BY SIR JOHN TROLLOPE, BART.

# THE MYSTERIES OF MODERN LONDON

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# MYSTERIES of MODERN LONDON

A Novel

BY

SIR JOHN TROLLOPE, Bart.

LONDON
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# THE MYSTERIES

OF

# MODERN LONDON

## CHAPTER I

### IN THE FOG

ONE Sunday night in the month of November worthy Captain Paddy O'Chrane was seated in front of a gigantic jorum of grog in the parlour of the Crown Arms.

As there are at least half a hundred taverns in London bearing as their sign the royal arms, we deem it not unnecessary to specify that the establishment to which we allude looked out, with its four red-curtained windows, upon Water Street, Tower-hill.

As for Captain Paddy, he was an Irishman, six feet in height, and dressed in a blue tail-coat with black buttons, leather breeches buckled over woollen stockings, and huge unpolished shoes.

At the other side of the parlour was seated a man of about forty, with a quiet and honest countenance. He wore a decent costume, without any pretensions to style, but which, at the same time, displayed no signs of poverty.

His motionless and dilated eyes had the fixed look of people that cannot see. He came now and then to the tavern, where he was known as "Dark (*i.e.* blind) Tyrrel."

Mrs. Burnett, the sovereign lady of these realms, whose throne was naturally in the bar, came in occasionally to speak pleasantly with Captain Paddy, who was evidently a regular customer.

A barmaid was standing at the end of the bar. This girl would

have made her fortune by doing nothing at the period when artists were princes and paid their models their weight in gold. She was gloriously beautiful. Her brow was capacious, like that of an antique statue. Her long, jet black locks had burst through the imprisonment of her little muslin cap in large ringlets and fell on her half-naked shoulders. Her waist was exquisitely formed, and added a dignity to the perfection of her face, just as a handsome pedestal enhances the value of a statue.

The Jewish type prevailed in her features, and her complexion was not that of an English girl.

She was standing within the bar as if made of marble, paying no attention to what was going on around her. Her black, widely-opened eyes were vacant and lustreless as a somnambulist's.

It was on her that the blind man's sightless orbs were fixed as he slowly swallowed his glass of negus. In the interval between each mouthful his lips moved, and he seemed to be engaged in one of those self-communings in which people deprived of sight so frequently indulge.

In the tap some twenty persons, whose disorderly costume resembled that of Thames watermen, were assembled, drinking quarterns of "neat" gin.

"Susannah!" said Captain O'Chrane, "mix me, my angel, mix me six penn'orth of gin—cold, without; and you will plaze give it the laste taste o' limon."

The pretty girl to whom the order was given did not hear or stir.

"I am hanged if she will hear me," the Captain growled. "I shall be obliged to call the missus. Attention, Mrs. Burnett!"

The sovereign dame of the Crown Arms walked in with a step both majestic and unassuming. She was very red, very short, and wore a cap whose lace frill was at least two feet in height.

"Confound me, Mrs. Burnett," the Captain went on, "if I did not first call Sukey; but an ironclad moight foire a Woolwich Infant close to her lug, and she would not stir an inch; divil take me if she would."

"Sukey," Mrs. Burnett cried, in a sharp voice. An almost imperceptible quivering affected the blind man's eyelids. The girl did not stir.

"Tunder and turf! Mrs. Burnett," the Captain said; "I'll lay you a shilling to sixpence that she would not condescend to answer the Lord Mayor in his official robes! Och, the pride of her!"

While the Captain was speaking, Mrs. Burnett walked up to Susannah, and shook her roughly by the arm.

"Well, lazybones, what's your lay now?" she said, angrily.

The girl fell back a step, and turned purple. A queen might have envied the involuntary gesture with which she answered her mistress's brutal attack. It was a gesture so full of pride and such true dignity, that the hostess stood with gaping mouth, incapable of saying a word more.

The blind man, at this moment, smiled and rubbed his hands as if a pleasant thought had suddenly crossed his mind.

But Susannah soon resumed her attitude of dull indifference. The flash of her glorious black eyes died out, and Mrs. Burnett regained her courage.

"There's gratitude for giving bread to a starving wretch," she said; "that's what one gets for sheltering a beggar without a rag to her back. In return, she ruins your business, offends your customers——"

"Mrs. Burnett," the Captain interrupted her, "sure, I niver intinded to raise all this row. Let the poor girl alone, for Heaven's sake, and give me my grog."

The hostess obeyed; but, offended at the unusual tone the Captain assumed with her, she was determined to avenge herself on the dependent, and, with a bullying gesture common to low women in all countries, she thrust her clenched fist under the girl's nose as much as to say—"smell that."

The barmaid smiled contemptuously; the blind man swallowed at a draught the rest of his negus.

"I would not have missed this for a hundred pound," he muttered.

Seven o'clock struck. The conclave in the tap noisily broke up, and one of them, a tall and most powerful fellow, thrust his head into the parlour.

The Captain quickly rose.

"All right, Turnbull, all right, you long scoundrel," he growled as he buttoned up his blue tail-coat to the very neck. "Susannah! but she wont hear me—Mrs. Burnett, I shall be back this evening, my dear lady, or the divil's took me. Have my 'usual' ready; you know, ma'am—sixpenn'orth of gin cold without, and a dilicate squeeze of limon."

The Captain took his cane and walked majestically out of the tavern. The watermen had preceded him, and were proceeding in company toward Lower Thames Street. The watermen walked in parties of three or four, pretending intoxication and singing noisily; Paddy followed at about twenty yards' distance.

On passing the gate of the Custom House, where two or three officers were enjoying the fog while smoking confiscated smuggled cigars, Paddy raised his hand to his hat, and said, pointing to the sailors:

"Pretty scoundrels, those, Mr. Bittern."

"Jolly lads, Mr. O'Chrane," the Customs officer replied.

"It's thick wid a fog," Paddy added.

"You are about right."

Paddy rejoined his men in a deserted alley leading to the Thames at the end of Rodolph Lane. They walked along it in the most profound silence, and reached a flight of steps, in bad condition and long deserted, owing to its proximity to Custom House stairs. The Captain took a piercing glance around him, and, as it may be supposed, he noticed nothing of a suspicious nature, for he gave a signal, and the sailors noiselessly descended the steps.

"Who sports the coat to-night?" Paddy asked.

Two men emerged from the ranks.

"Sawney and Phil," the Captain went on; "keep your eyes skinned, you villains, and we'll be afther tumbling into the boats."

The two men remained at the head of the stairs, wrapped themselves in heavy watchmen's coats, and lay down on the ground.

The rest of the wherrymen and the Captain divided their numbers between three sharply-built boats, whose gunwhales rose very slightly above the water.

"Out oars," Paddy commanded, in a low voice; "give way of all."

The three boats silently quitted the bank, and stole their way with great difficulty through the crowd of vessels that encumbered the river. At one moment they glided past the gigantic prow of some merchantman, at another the sides of a deserted steamer, or entangled their oars in the network of cables that surrounded them.

A dense fog that could almost be felt, impregnated with the heavy coal smoke, covered the river like an immense pall. Only a few lights, looking red through the fog, were here and there visible, and nearly all the lanterns on board ships were extinguished. Only now and then a forgotten light was beginning to burn dimly over the sleeping watchman.

It was Sunday evening, so nothing was stirring. Beyond the deserted vessels, Southwark and the City showed their obscured gas lights and the ruddy windows of the public-houses. The

Captain's three boats at length reached mid-channel, and began pulling up the river.

"Fine weather, Tommy, my boy," said the Captain, as they passed under London Bridge.

"Very fine, Captain," sturdy Tom Turnbull answered; "but the tide is almost at the full."

"And the breeze will rise with the ebb," one of the rowers added—a man of enormous size, who filled up the whole width of the boat. "We must make haste, for the fog will not hold."

"Make haste, Fat Charley, make haste!" said a little boy, a most precocious youth, who answered to the name of Snail. "We must let his Honour hear we are at work again, for our pockets are empty, and life is hard, as Master Bob Lantern says."

"Silence, you robber's spawn!" the Captain interrupted; "the less said about his Honour the better. But what has become of that food-for-the-gallows—our dear Bob Lantern?"

"Spliced," Charley answered; "spliced in St. Giles's, to a woman six feet in her stockings. We'll never see anything of him no more."

"Master Bob," Snail exclaimed, "is cleverer than us; he works on his own account. On Sunday nights he goes to church, and there's a good stroke of pocket diving to be done there."

"Peace, gallows-bird," the Captain again interrupted; here we are under Blackfriars Bridge. Charley, you'll run the bridge down, you big fool—pull larboard oars, pull!"

He was obeyed: the boat emerged from the dense shadow under the arch, and the two banks became again visible.

"Hullo!" Tom Turnbull exclaimed; "three lights! there's plenty of work for us, and three boats wont be too many."

The lights to which Tom alluded could be clearly distinguished through the fog. One of them was at Whitefriars, the second at the river side, near the Temple Gardens, and the third was in Southwark, to the left of Old Barge House-stairs. All three shed green rays of great intensity; but in the midst of the lights of every description that gleamed in the open air, or behind the windows, they necessarily passed unnoticed by those not in the secret.

"We must part company," said the Captain. "I will take old Gruff, my best friend, and his ould venomous *King George's Head* —the divil burn it!—you'll take the *White Horse*, Gibby; and you, Mitchell, Southwark and the *Garter;* and behave yourselves, you scoundrels, like gentlemen of the quality."

One of the boats, in consequence of this order, pulled across to Southwark, while the Captain proceeded up the river.

"No yellow lamp to-day," said Turnbull; "that's funny at a time when people are coming in shoals from the Continent."

"It's lucky, you mean," Paddy replied. "I don't like to see the yellow light; I always fancy I can hear the last cry of the poor divil we killed. Yis, it may be a weakness; but whiniver I see the yellow light I drink brandy, instead of ould Tom at night, to cheer me up. You are laughing, Tom, you villain without compassion; well, I tell you it costs me a shilling more, and that is an object, anyhow."

"One stiff more, one less," Turnbull said carelessly; "taking a quantity—it's nothing."

"Nothing at all," little Snail added, with a grin.

'And then," Fat Charley continued, "people must live, Captain. If our three landlords did not do a little smothering business now and then, what would become of the good old trade of the resurrection men?"

"I like to see the yellow lantern," little Snail wound up emphatically.

"At so tender an age," Paddy muttered, "that lad is the most venomous reptile I know. Look out, Charley."

Their boat, which was now alone, had left the mid-channel, and was threading the labyrinth of steamers and pleasure boats moored off shore. Charley pulled sturdily, Turnbull shifted the tiller, and the boat reached the foot of the Temple Gardens without any obstacle.

The spot where it stopped formed a sort of small dock, protected by a tall house, built partly on piles and partly on main land. It was this house that showed the green light. Paddy felt at one of the enormous piles that supported the house, and found an iron wire ending in a ring, which he pulled.

A few minutes later a noise could be heard just over the boat, like a trapdoor grating on its rusty hinges.

"Who's below?" a low voice asked.

"A friend, my honest and respectable Mr. Gruff," the Captain replied. "May I be hanged straight off if I am not delighted to wish you good evening. And pray how is your amiable wife?"

Our polite Paddy was interrupted by a heavy blow from a package suspended from a rope, the other end of which was fastened above.

"All right, Gruff, you big villain," he growled angrily. "I

only hope you may fall through the trap-door on some foggy night like this, and no boat below."

While cursing he got out of the way sharply, and his men unfastened the package, which they threw into the bottom of the boat. The cord was pulled up again.

"It smells of perfumery," said Tom. "It's a gentleman's portmanteau, for sure. Charley, look to the plug before the boat's full."

"The plug works all right, Tommy; for I shouldn't like to take a bath to-night," the fat rower answered.

A second bale hovered over the speaker, and was disposed of in the same way. Four packages were thus put in the boat.

"Good night," the voice above then said sulkily. The cord disappeared, and the trap was closed again.

"Pull, Charley, my babe!" the Captain ordered. "The fog looks as if it was going to rise. Good night, Gruff, you ould vampire—you confirmed assassinator, good night. But here's the Whitefriars boat. Hilloh!"

"Hilloh! Six packages, Captain."

"Good. Pull, my beauties. I can see the boat of that thorough-paced villain Mitchell now. Boat ahoy!"

"Ahoy. Two little parcels, Captain."

"Only two little parcels!" Paddy repeated, with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders.

The three boats began descending the river again with the tide. They went on rapidly, and soon found themselves once again under the arches of London Bridge.

The fog had diminished in intensity, owing to a strong breeze that had risen at the ebb. A forest of masts, festooned together by thin cordage, now stood out on the sky, and the river was beginning vaguely to reflect the distant gas-lights.

"It's getting ticklish," Turnbull said; "the full light of the bridge lamps falls on us: we shall be seen."

"Pull, Charley, you porpoise!" the Captain commanded; "a stroke or so, and we shall be hidden behind that East Injyman. If it plase the pigs, we shall get safe to port somehow yet; if not——"

Paddy broke off, heaved a deep sigh, and continued, "The water will be could for a bath, my duckies."

The boat left the mid-channel, where the darkness was growing visible, to enter the shadow cast by the ship. Charley ceased rowing, though they were still about a hundred yards from the landing-place. The other two boats came up and imitated his example.

"Miaw, Snail, you little ape!" said the Captain. At the same moment a shrill and exquisitely-imitated miawling was heard from the boat. A few seconds after, a hoarse barking was heard from the shore.

"Curses on it!" Paddy growled; "the road's barred: after all, though, that divil of a Sawney barks so well, that you never know whether it's he or some other mangy dog prowling about the streets. Miaw again, Snail."

The catcall was heard again, and was answered by a second bark.

"There's no mistake about it," Turnbull muttered; "it's Sawney. The police-galley is between us and the stairs."

"Come, my lads." Paddy added, "we must try to reach lands above bridge; luckily, the breeze is falling and the fog coming back. Pull all."

The three boats started together; but at the moment when Paddy emerged from the shadow, a black mass dashed acros the bows of the East Indiaman.

"Boat ahoy!" an imperious voice shouted.

"Pull, Tommy, bring her round, Charley," the Captain whispered.

The boat responded to the combined efforts of the two sailors, but a heavy grapnel suddenly fell over its gunwale, and instantaneously pulled it up.

"Look sharp and cut the rope, confound you, my clever fellows," the Captain said.

Tommy dealt a tremendous chop with an axe. "It's chain," he muttered savagely. "No go."

"Boat ahoy!" was repeated at this moment. There was no answer.

The chain grew tauter, and the boat was violently dragged toward the black mass, which was a police-galley.

The Captain pulled his hat down on his forehead and thrust his cane through his belt.

"Look out for yoursilves," he said, "though I niver wanted to take a bath to-night. Charley, your foot is on the plug—out wid it. Let go your oar, Tommy, and get ashore as you can."

As if by magic, the bottom of the boat opened, and men and packages fell into the water. The police grapnel only brought home an empty sinking shell. The other two boats, taking advantage of the confusion, reached the landing-place at the same time.

"The water's could," said the Captain, as he set foot on the stairs, "could as ice-crame."

He had lost neither hat nor coat, however.

Snail shook himself like a drowned rat, miawled facetiously, and crept under Sawney's coat, who barked a welcome. The others loaded the bundles on their shoulders, and went up the gloomy lane, being careful this time not to pass the Custom House. As for the worthy Captain, he went quickly home to put on another blue coat and fresh leather breeches, after which he sauntered to the Crown Arms.

At the moment he entered the parlour a violent scene, resembling the one we have already mentioned, was taking place between Mrs. Burnett and her barmaid Susannah. The latter opposed to the noisy and passionate demonstrations of her mistress a calmness that resembled disdain or apathy. Mrs. Burnett had never been greatly renowned for her patience, and being now thoroughly exasperated, she raised her hand, which fell brutally on Susannah's pale cheek.

"What a pity," Paddy thought; "that will delay my grog." The blind man had not stirred during our nautical excursion, but had called for a second glass of negus. He, doubtless, heard the blow, for he rose eagerly. He stretched out his neck, and his face, generally insignificant, expressed all at once a curiosity excited to passion.

"Is she a virago?" he thought aloud. Susannah suffered a terrible shock. Her livid features contracted, and a gloomy fire burned in her eye. Her powerful nature instinctively revolting against an outrage, it seemed as if she were about to bound forward and strike in turn; her supple and muscular body was drawn up like a young and powerful panther about to leap on its prey.

"Hullo!" said the Captain; "a bull to a tanner that my worthy friend is about to receive a dressing, and it's my opinion that it will not be thrown away."

Mrs. Burnett had the same fear, for the deep colour disappeared from her cheeks, and she trembled. But the lovely girl, suppressing her passion, folded her arms on her chest disdainfully. The blind man gave vent to a sigh of relief. Susannah, without saying a word, left the bar slowly and walked out of the house. Tyrrel threw a crown on the table, forgot to ask for his change, and groped his way out too.

"Come," said Paddy, "my dear friend has had a lucky escape. As for Sukey, thanks to that divil of a Tyrrel, she will have shelter for the night, at any rate, provided he does not break his neck.

Tyrrel, on reaching the street, heard a light footfall in the di-

rection of Lower Thames Street, and proceeded towards it. Susannah's foot was firm, and touched the ground at regular intervals. She was not hurried. By the fitful light of the gas-lamps, the beauty of her outline attained almost fantastic perfection. Tyrrel followed her without hesitation, as if a mysterious instinct illumined his dark sight. He no longer groped his way.

On leaving Lower Thames Street, Susannah took the same road the watermen had done, and entered the narrow lane leading to the river. Tyrrel hurried on and passed her.

"Where are you going, my girl?" he turned and asked anxiously.

"To the Thames," Susannah answered, without stopping, but without hurrying on.

It was the first word Tyrrel had heard her utter. The voice, gentle and serious, resembled her face—it was beautiful, but it was gloomy.

"To the Thames," Tyrrel repeated; "are you thinking of death?"

"Yes," Susan answered.

"Why, my girl, why?"

"Because I have neither hope for the future, nor shelter for the present."

"I will give you shelter, Susannah, and restore you hope."

But Susannah did not stop.

"Many men have spoken to me so before now," she answered; "they wished to house me. You are like them, of course, but I prefer the river bed."

"Heaven forbid, Susannah!"

"I love a man," she exclaimed, "and that is why I cannot accept another's shelter."

Tyrrel fell back in amazement.

"Is that the only reasan?" he asked.

"Yes," the girl answered, wearily.

She was going to take the few steps that still separated her from the Thames, when Tyrrel seized her arm, and said, with mingled curiosity and emotion—

"Then you would not hesitate to accept even me if you were not already another's, Susannah?"

"Ashamed!" she repeated. "No."

"What did your mother teach you when you were good?" Tyrrel exclaimed, in stupefaction.

"Nothing. I am the child of a Christian mother, who deserted me in the cradle, and of a Jew hung at Newgate."

Susannah uttered these words simply, without any effort.

"You are ignorant, then, of good teaching?" Tyrrel continued.

"No," she answered, "but I know what life is."

Then, suddenly becoming animated, she added in a ringing voice—

"My father was very rich ere he was hung. I was taught to dress well, to sing—dance—talk several Continental languages."

"Are you speaking the truth?" Tyrrel interrupted.

"Am I not about to die?" the girl answered, coldly.

The light of a lamp, lit up in an adjoining house, suddenly fell on the two actors in this scene. Susannah's exquisite features had reassumed their sullen immobility, while, on the contrary, Tyrrel's eye sparkled with strange lustre.

"And suppose you were restored to such a life as you led at your father's, my child?"

"My old life!—that sweet life!" the girl murmured; "my former existence."

"I will give it you back, I tell you."

Susannah seemed to hesitate for a moment. Then freeing herself by a sudden jerk, she coldly measured the distance that separated her from the river, saying—

"So many have sung the same song. No; my heart is one man's alone."

"I do not ask you for love, child!" Tyrrel exclaimed. "Do you not see that I am blind to all, even your beauty?"

These words reached Susannah's ear at the moment when she was leaning over the water; she drew herself back.

"You don't care for my heart or my beauty," she repeated, "and you are blind! What can you want of me, then?"

"Your mind."

Susannah bowed her lovely head on her bosom.

"One day," she muttered, "I fell dying of fatigue and hunger on the threshold of that woman who has just struck me. In exchange for my liberty, she gave me food—naught but food. I can still be a servant."

"Do you accept my offer—better than that?" Tyrrel asked.

"What do you want of me?"

Tyrrel drew from his pocket a well-filled purse, which he placed in Susannah's hand.

"You will still stand and wait," he said; "but mark! I buy you, not for myself, who am weak, but for an association which is terrible and strong. I know you better than you know your-

self, and know what you can do. Silence as to our meeting. Fidelity and passive obedience, such are your duties. Spend this night where you please; but to-morrow, at mid-day, rap at the door indicated by this address (he handed a card); that door will open, and you will enter and give your orders—for that house will be yours. Fare you well, Susannah, till we meet again."

## CHAPTER II.

### IN THE ABBEY

At the same moment when Captain O'Chrane escaped by diving from the pursuit of the police boat, Stephen MacNab, a Scotchman by birth, and physician by profession, aged twenty-four, offered an arm to each of his cousins to conduct them to Westminster Abbey.

MacNab's cousins went on the first Sunday of every month to Westminster Abbey to hear a sermon and the choral service. The elder was called Clara, the younger Anna; and their father, a magistrate in Dumfries, lived at Crewe House, near Lochmaben, his name being Angus Macfarlane.

Clara and Anna were two of the prettiest girls to be seen in a day's march. To see them reminded you instantly of that picture in which Thompson produced, in so graceful a manner, one of the most charming creations of our great romance writer, Minna and Brenda Troil. They did not possess, however, the cloudy, vague beauty of northern virgins; they were true daughters of southern Scotland, with graceful manners, and a delicately-meaning smile. Clara had a haughtier glance and a more melancholy smile—she was Minna. Anna, on the contrary, timid, yet mirthful, had retained her childish expression; she only saw joy and happiness in the prospect of her future life; no thought of sorrow had ever contracted her innocent brow: her large black eye, which glistened beneath her long eyelashes, only knew those tears which flow without bitterness and dry on the cheek without leaving a trace on the mind. She was Brenda.

Both had been educated in the strict ideas of the Scotch Episcopalian Church. Prayer was their principal occupation, and religious matters filled up their life. Stephen MacNab's mother,

their aunt, with whom they resided, was, like them, Scotch, and, like them, pious. Her house was only visited by a few charitable, but not very lively ladies, and the Rev. John Butler, of the Abbey, who felt a paternal affection for the two young ladies.

As for MacNab, he was a worthy young man, who, after studying medicine for five years, was lingering in London until the Royal College thought proper to admit him among its fellows, and fancied himself thoroughly acquainted with life. He played whist decently, dressed fashionably, and was not too pedantic for a rising young doctor. He loved his two cousins greatly—that is to say, Miss Macfarlane as a sweetheart, and Miss Anna as a friend; but these two feelings did not differ so greatly that he could come to any settled decision. In defining them we anticipate their development, and had you cross-questioned Stephen, he could not have told you so much.

However this may be, on the Sunday to which we refer, as Mrs. MacNab was unwell, it was Stephen's duty to act as guard of honour. He walked in delight along Whitehall, and felt proud of having such charming companions on his arm. Clara was silent and pensive—smiling now and then at her cousin's jests, mechanically and through politeness; Anna listened with all her ears, and could not remember ever having met a man so clever as Stephen.

The nearer they approached the Abbey, the more the latter lost his gaiety. Five years of University life had considerably lessened that devotional ardour he had also brought with him from Scotland. He was still a good Christian, but a sermon seemed to him a perspective that did not possess many attractions.

"My dear cousins," he suddenly said, as they turned into the Sanctuary, "I am a terribly careless fellow."

"Why so?" Anna asked.

Clara had not heard the remark.

'Because I have forgotten to visit a patient."

Stephen uttered these words with some emphasis. This patient was his first one.

"You can do so to-morrow."

"To-morrow; it may be too late."

Clara looked at Stephen with a smile, and nodded. She fancied that her cousin had made a grim joke.

"Excellent!" she remarked.

MacNab looked at her in amazement.

"What do you find to admire in that, Clara?" Anna asked; "Mr. MacNab says that he has an important visit to pay—we shall be left alone."

"What matters? Coz. will join us again."

"Of course," Stephen said eagerly; "it will not detain me for a moment."

They reached the Abbey, where Anna left go of her cousin's arm with a pout. Clara followed her, and Stephen was left alone, when he began thinking.

"Clara has singular notions," he said to himself, "and I fancy that she can sacrifice my protection very easily. Suppose I were to go in?"

Even should the reader form a very unfavourable opinion of Mr. MacNab, who will play an important part in this narrative, we are compelled to say that he had no visit to pay. The Rev. John Butler's sermon had appalled him, that was all. It was very wrong; but, perhaps, may be forgiven in a young medical man of four-and-twenty. However, instead of hearing the sermon, he had projected a long gossip with some friend in the neighbourhood, or something of that sort; but Clara's distraction caused him to reflect. He entered the church at this time, and concealing himself behind a pillar in the choir, he began watching the sisters—himself unseen. This, again, was very wrong; but some remarks had been made about a marriage between Mr. MacNab and one of his cousins—whichever he preferred. He, therefore, had some right to act as an observer.

Mr. Butler's flock on this occasion was composed entirely of females. This small congregation was confined to the choir.

MacNab saw nothing at first. The two maidens, kneeling in the midst of a tenfold row of women, were absorbed in prayer. The Rev. John Butler, standing at a small lectern, was reading the evening service. When he ceased there was a lengthened silence, during which all were engaged in private prayer. Presently they rose.

At this moment MacNab was enabled to see the faces of the sisters. Anna, before sitting down to listen to the sermon, looked kindly at her companions; but Clara, the North Briton, did not imitate her example, for she glanced carelessly toward the pillar behind which he was leaning. At the same instant she started quickly and bowed her head, while a sudden pallor drove the ruddy hue from her cheeks.

"What an awkward fellow I am," said the Scot to himself. "She recognised me."

By an instinctive movement, he shrank behind the pillar. A moment after he cautiously thrust forth his head again. Clara had regained her old position. Although the clergyman had begun his sermon, she did not seat herself. A mysterious force

seemed to render her limbs rigid, and her piercing, flashing glance did not move from the pillar.

"That's strange," thought MacNab, "I never saw her look like that before."

After repeating the same movement two or three times, he asked himself a question, which another would have done at the first experiment—

"Is she really looking at me, though?"

To make certain, he walked round the pillar, and found himself face to face with a man leaning against the stone on the other side. This man's eyes were closed, and a smile played round his lips. MacNab started, and turned pale in his turn. He took a rapid glance at Clara; but her back was turned to him, for she had seated herself. It was Anna, who answered him by a glance of recognition which meant, "So glad your visit did not keep you long."

Then MacNab felt a pain dart through his heart—the first, perhaps, he had ever experienced. Clara, whom he had hitherto loved when he had nothing else to do, now appeared to him the object of his life—a thing necessary for his happiness. There was no hesitation now; not even a thought for Anna, or a suspicion that she could outvie her sister. He loved Clara—he knew it: he no longer remembered the remote period, a moment ago, from which a gulf henceforth separated him—the period when he was ignorant of his passion. His forehead burned, his heart bounded violently, and his eyes filled with tears.

MacNab remained for a moment crushed by the blow. His firm and positive nature struggled to obtain the mastery, but did not succeed. He fixed a glance full of hatred on the man he believed his rival, and mentally declared war to the death against him. The latter did not appear to notice it; his eyes remained closed, his mouth retained its smile.

MacNab was violently tempted to touch him on the arm and lead him out to have it over at once; but what motive could he offer for such a challenge? Besides, although he was what is called a brave man, there was Scotch blood in him. Fisticuffs appeared to him doubtful and insecure methods for an affair of this importance. He was one of those sensible and logical men who, in their rancour, readily fight for a cross look.

The individual leaning against the pillar seemed a model of activity and muscular strength. He was a man of about thirty years of age, tall and aristocratic. His attire, perfectly simple, but in wonderful taste, as much resembled that of the slaves of fashion as the portrait of a master resembles the pale copy of a Wardour-

street artist. As for his face, it presented a remarkable type of masculine and intellectual beauty; his tall, wide, and unwrinkled brow, crossed from top to bottom by a slight scar, almost imperceptible when his face was in repose, was surrounded by magnificent black hair. His eyes could not be seen, but their power might be guessed beneath the drooping eyelids. His lips, now parted by a smile, allowed a row of small white teeth to be seen, which would have done honour to the mouth of a pretty woman. All these feminine features were relieved by two bushy and sharply-defined eyebrows, which gave him an appearance of firmness and pride.

MacNab looked at him for a long time angrily. The young doctor knew that he was a good-looking fellow, but the idea did not occur to him that there was any comparison between him and this superb stranger. His jealousy made his fancied rival handsomer than he really was. To him this idle dreamer assumed extraordinary and fatal proportions; he was one of those men with magnetic glances who, in romances, arrive expressly to assail impregnable virtues.

MacNab could not even find fault with the slight scar on his forehead; he did not see it, although the part of the Abbey where he stood was brilliantly lit up. For this wound to become distinctly visible in its whiteness, the forehead had to redden under the effect of a suddenly-aroused passion, and at this moment the dreamer's brow was pale and smooth as a child's. In his desperation the Scotchman fixed his spite on the closed eyes; he fancied them dull and awry, and at last, carried away by hope, he rubbed his hands, saying—

"I dare say he squints!"

This comforting idea sensibly calmed him, and, as the sermon was drawing to an end, he withdrew his scrutiny from the handsome dreamer in order to observe more conveniently Clara's conduct in the movement that was about to take place among the congregation. As she rose Clara took a second glance at the attractive pillar, and this time again it was long, piercing, and full of fire. MacNab would have given six months of his life for such a glance; he was anxious to see, though, how the dreamer responded to it.

Strange to say, he still went on brooding, and had not even opened his eyes. He played a passive part, and MacNab felt himself deeply humiliated.

"He does not even see her," he muttered, quivering with rage; "it is she who loves, and not he. This man, then, has outstripped me without knowing it."

This logical conclusion deeply wounded the Scot, and brought cold perspiration on his forehead. In the meantime, Clara turned towards the altar.

"For our sick and poor," a soft voice behind MacNab murmured at this moment.

He turned and noticed Anna holding the offertory purse, according to the fashion in some High Churches. Stephen, in his distress, thought himself bound to act like a madman. He felt in his waistcoat pocket, and, suffering from an attack of unjustifiable generosity, he threw four half crowns noisily one after the other into the bag. Anna thanked him with a smile.

After this romantic act of generosity the Northerner drew himself up, and took a triumphant glance at his mysterious rival.

"In liberality, at any rate," he thought, "I shall beat you, my hateful stranger."

"For our sick and poor," said Miss Macfarlane again, as she stopped before the dreamer.

He started, and half opened his eyes. At the sight of Anna he fell back a pace and raised his hand to his forehead, as a man does when he believes himself the sport of an illusion; then he remained motionless, and fixed his eye on the maiden. Anna, ashamed and blushing, prepared to move on, but the dreamer detained her by a gesture full of grace, and, drawing from his pocket a handsome note-case, he took from it a bank note, which he dropped into the purse with a deep bow.

MacNab convulsively clenched his fists, and bit his lip till it bled. He had distinctly seen the word *Ten* engraved in Gothic letters on a corner of the note.

"Ten pounds! and I gave ten shillings!" he growled.

The stranger watched Miss Macfarlane for some time as she continued her collection. When she was lost in the crowd, he drew himself up to his full height and looked around. His eye wandered vacantly over MacNab.

"He does not squint," the latter thought mournfully. Then, collecting himself suddenly, he added, "But where the deuce have I seen that face?"

It was in vain that he cross-questioned his memory. He soon supposed that a vague resemblance had occasioned the fancy.

The stranger did not squint, anything but it. His large eyes, of a deep blue, doubled the charms of his countenance. His glance was commanding and full of thought.

Night had set in long before. That part of the Abbey in

which the congregation were assembled was brilliantly lit up, while the nave and side aisles disappeared in complete darkness. The handsome stranger, disturbed in his reverie, quitted his pillar and walked slowly towards one of the aisles.

At the same time a badly-dressed man, with a hangdog countenance, started too, who had opened his eyes widely at the sight of the bank note. This man, instead of following our dreamer, entered the opposite aisle, so that, in their walk, the two were sure to meet in the centre of the nave; that is to say, the darkest and most deserted spot.

## CHAPTER III.

### AN ESCAPE

MacNab noticed the stealthy and suspicious movement of the seedy-looking individual, and a sudden thought crossed his mind. He had been in London long enough to know that malefactors do not hesitate to commit sacrilege. He fancied that a murder was about to be committed; and though, in the event of his suspicions being well founded, this murder would marvellously serve his interests, MacNab, if he were not the hero of a romance, was a man of education and honour. Hence, rejecting the selfish feeling which had first led him to rejoice, he quitted his place in his turn and rushed into the gloom, resolved to aid the stranger were it necessary.

The latter walked slowly. He stopped now and then, retraced his steps, and then resumed his walk, as if seeking something. More than once he stopped to admire the play of the light on the forest of pillars, and then went on, forgetful of himself and the whole world.

MacNab followed him for some time; but the nave was plunged in such obscurity, that at ten yards off objects completely disappeared. In one of these capricious turnings in which the dreamer indulged our Scot lost him entirely, and, do all he could, was unable to discover him again. MacNab then rushed to the other aisle, to stop the villain, whom he supposed actuated by sacrilegious motives, but the tatterdemalion had disappeared.

MacNab was in a state of singular perplexity. Ought he to interrupt the service and have the nave lighted up for a mere suspicion, which, at the first blush, would appear to every one absurd? Must he await a cry as a signal whither he should hurry?

The first mode was certainly the surest and best, but Stephen did not dare employ it. He waited in a sort of feverish expectation, fancying at each moment he could hear the hoarse and strangled cry of a man wounded to death.

Our handsome dreamer, ignorant of the perhaps imaginary danger, and of the anxiety of which he was the object, pursued his stroll. He had reached that part of the nave which was covered with matting, and this, by deadening the sound of his footsteps, had caused MacNab to lose sight of him. Presently he sat down to continue his reverie.

As he did so he fancied he heard a slight rustling behind him, but paid no attention to it, save that it imperceptibly changed the current of his thoughts. The immense nave, so gloomy and solitary, suddenly presented itself to him in a lugubrious aspect. The sound of the expiring voluntary seemed to him well adapted to conceal a dying groan. The shadow might conceal malefactors, and while God was being implored under the lamps, Satan was possibly walking in the dark and laughing as he guided the cautious footsteps of an assassin.

He was indulging in these new thoughts, when another sound, still light, but nearer, smote his ear. It was like the rustling of a body on the matting. The stranger remained motionless, but his mind, suddenly restored to reality, coldly examined the situation. By a slow, continuous, and imperceptible motion, he turned his head and saw a black mass crawling towards him.

"The scoundrel has stolen my idea," he thought; "he wants to assassinate me!"

He did not stir yet, though, but waited. The individual who was crawling up suddenly rose and bounded forward, but his knife, though well aimed, only struck the back of a bench. The stranger had stepped on one side, and when the assassin tried to draw himself up, he felt his wrist squeezed as in a vice.

"Oh!" he said, as a roar of pain burst from him, "I fancied there was only one nipper in the world like that."

He put his face close to the stranger's, and, as soon as their eyes were accustomed to the gloom, there was a mutual recognition.

"Bob Lantern," our handsome hero muttered.

"Mercy, your honour!" the assassin exclaimed as he fell on his knees; "blest if I know'd yer."

His honour let go Bob Lantern's arm, and the latter at once clasped his hands in supplication.

"Overlook it, cap'n," he said; "my dear Mr. Edwardes, I did not tumble to you in that coat; your waist is as taper as a donna's."

"Is that a reason for 'stiffening' a man in a church?"

"I am sharpset, master; you don't cash up liberal, and life is so hard in London; if things were as they used to was in Scotland——"

"Silence!" Mr. Edwardes said, imperiously; what are your mates about?"

"Not much; life is so hard——"

"Come to morrow and you shall finger some blunt; but, confound it, no more tricks of this sort, Master Bob."

Mr. Edwardes proceeded towards the aisle, followed by Bob, with his hands in his pockets and the look of a flogged hound.

Wearied of waiting, MacNab had returned to the spot whence the congregation were preparing to withdraw. It was with inexpressible surprise that he saw the stranger come back, followed by the shabby fellow. The danger over, all his ill-temper and anger regained the upper hand, and he almost repented his feelings of alarm.

Mr. Edwardes at this moment no longer deserved the title of "dreamer" we have so frequently given him. He walked along with head erect, like a man free from thought. He stopped a moment, and, throwing away the glove with which he had gripped Bob Lantern, began the long and difficult operation of manipulating on another. Bob picked up the cast glove and put it in his pocket. It was a poor prey; but there are people who do not like to see a pin lost, and Bob Lantern was a man to collect in a strange pocket sooner than collect nothing.

While pulling on his glove, Mr. Edwardes noticed the charming collector-of-alms, but he did not perceive Clara, whose eyes were not once taken off him. On the contrary, MacNab only saw Clara, and jealousy made his blood boil.

"She is decidedly ravishing," he muttered, as he beckoned for Bob to approach.

When he was within reach, he stooped down, and whispered in his ear:

"D'you mark that pretty girl over there near the pulpit?"

"I see several."

"The prettiest one?"

"That depends upon taste."

"The one clasping her prayer-book?"

"The gal with the bag?"

"Exactly. Follow her, and let me know where she lives, tomorrow."

Bob Lantern gave an affirmative nod, and Mr. Edwardes, having finished smoothing on his gloves, withdrew. He passed

close to the Scotchman, but did not notice the hateful glance the young doctor bent on him. Clara looked after him to the gateway. He had scarce gone ere MacNab hurried up to Bob Lantern.

"I want the name of that man," he said.

"What man?" asked Bob, instead of answering.

"The man who just now spoke to you."

"That's not a *man*," Bob said emphatically; "he's a gen'leman."

"His name—man or gentleman."

"Don't know nothin' of names."

MacNab thrust his hand in his pocket and drew out a sovereign, which he slipped into Bob's hand.

"That turns the k'yard," the latter said, as he placed the gold in safety. "You wish to know his name?"

"Yes; make haste."

"Don't know, 'pon my honour."

Then performing the bow which is in all countries the sign of thanks with beggars, he added:

"Many returns, your Honour!" and vanished as if melting into the darkness.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A LION AMONG THE LADIES

On the following evening there was a grand ball at Trevor House Lord James Trevor, a great nobleman both by birth and fortune, had played a very brilliant part a few years previously. Since the coming in of a Liberal Ministry, he had held back, and his house was the gathering place of the notabilities of the Tory party. He was a widower, and his house was managed by his sister, Lady Champbell, who had kindly undertaken the education of the Hon. Miss Mary Trevor, his lordship's only daughter.

Lady Champbell had been charming in 18—. In 18—, the period when our story takes place, she had lost a notable portion of her beauty, but not the desire to please. This desire was not displayed in that grotesque fashion to be found in novels, and there only. She did not play with her fan more than was necessary to refresh her face. She did not give languishing glances on every possible occasion, nor did she condemn her friends to drag her rapidly round in the waltz. Her coquetry was different and more adroit: a woman of wit and excellent taste, she had honestly thrown aside all pretensions to youth. But it is not sufficient for a lady to make herself old if she wishes to obtain pardon for being no longer young. There is a rock which must be avoided under penalty of being and remaining old. Lady Champbell had seen this rock far ahead, and steered round it like an accomplished pilot. While abstaining from the pleasures of youth, she understood and so cleverly expressed what she called her regrets, that she was asked why she retired at so early an age—certainly a rare and flattering question for a lady.

Lady Champbell, then, was, in the society in which she lived, an exceptional woman; the age was left out of the question. She

was the queen and oracle of a chosen circle. Her admirers were all young men of fashion, and, try all she could, she was not so much respected as adored.

It was a glorious result, but possibly the honour cannot be attributed entirely to Lady Champbell's skilful manœuvres. In addition to her attractive powers, she had near her a loadstone, whose fascinations we must not omit.

Miss Trevor was eighteen years of age; she was of a frail and delicate beauty, whose type was formerly often reproduced in the pictures of Chalon, or seen at times in emblazoned carriages. She was very tall, and she stooped slightly; her complexion was transparently fair, only animated at times by a pinky hue, with none of that rosiness which is the brilliant symptom of strength and health. The transparency was most perceptible round her eyes, where it assumed a slight bluish tinge, in the centre of her forehead, and on her temples, which were crossed by small blue veins. Her sunshiny, fair hair fell in waving curls along her cheeks. Her eyes, of a tender blue, were frequently half closed, and then seemed to float in a humid and dazzling medium. Her smile was childlike; but when she was serious, there was a curve at each corner of her lip, which gave her mouth a disdainful expression.

Such was Miss Trevor by nature, and education had endowed her with new charms. She knew how to speak and when to hold her tongue; each of her movements revealed an hitherto unnoticed grace; whatever she did she did well. Timid as far as was proper, and ignorant of all that women do not need to know, she had learned to appear doubtful of herself, which is the modesty of proud people; she had learned, too, never to doubt the value of other persons; never to tell a falsehood except in cases of urgency, and to prolong her smile long after the remark that had occasioned it was forgotten.

Miss Trevor was the work of Lady Champbell. Weak, mentally and bodily, she had been in her aunt's skilful hands a clay soft and easy to model. Lady Champbell was justly proud of her handiwork, and immeasurably jealous of the despotic power she exercised over her niece. Miss Trevor was an only daughter; her father had £30,000 a year, it was generally said, but some asserted that the actual amount of his income was far beyond that sum.

It may be supposed that the heiress of this fortune, who, had she been poor, might perhaps have been loved for her own sake, did not lack admirers. Two years previously, at the period of her first "coming out," she had been surrounded by an innumerable court; at the appearance of a new planet, everybody, however

humble he may be, feels renewed hope, for Love has been seen to effect such miracles! But, in proportion as the star rises on the horizon, the circle widens. The humbler pass sentence on themselves unless they prefer turning yellow with envy at a distance, and only the strong are left, among whom the contest begins. It would be a grand sight were it not so common and visible gratis, in every drawing room where there is an heiress.

The struggle among the strong has one result—the heiress chooses, or her family for her. Then the ranks close up afresh; conquered ambitions are silent, the humble and the strong become once again equal, all have a share in the rays of the star, for, as it will henceforth be the property of one man, it belongs to all.

The worldly existence of Miss Trevor had regularly followed these phases. The strongest of the strong was a young man of modest fortune, but of princely origin, a younger son of the late Earl of Kirk, Frank Percival by name. Mary Trevor, or rather Lady Champbell, distinguished him, and everybody believed the battle ended, when all at once a new champion appeared, who renewed the fight and carried it on sturdily.

But it must not be forgotten that the champion was no less than Rio Santo in person.

Every one knew the Marquis of Rio Santo—the dazzling, the incomparable Marquis. Every one may have known that he spent £120,000 each winter, or £20,000 a month, and yet he was not an Australian mutton monarch.

One year the season arrived, and Rio Santo was not installed in his Belgravian palace. Tattersall's veiled its face, Hyde Park assumed mourning, and the ballet at the Alcazar danced a funeral measure in his honour. Was he dead? Was he ruined? No one could say; no one even knew. And, after all, what matter? Do men like Rio Santo require to live long? They pass a day or a year in a city, and then depart; but their memory remains. Racing and betting men unhat before pronouncing their name; and ladies, when they speak of them, let their eyes sink and assume a melancholy smile.

The greater number believed that Rio Santo would return some day.

Still, it remains a fact that Rio Santo arrived in London from Paris, where he had been the King of Fashion for several years in succession. He arrived, followed by his array of lacqueys, by his stud, the lowest horse in which was worth a Jew's eye, by his magnificent dogs, and several dozen French baronesses, who were dying for love of his pale complexion and sparkling blue eyes.

As a general rule, London is not often shaken to its core. Foreign princes and emperors' sons pass through it unnoticed, and the most prodigious tenors may sing their upper notes and not excite the slightest revolution. In order to produce any great effect in that surprising and civilised city, a man must be a gorilla-slayer, a Blondin, or, at the least, a North Pole discoverer. Rio Santo was nothing of all this, he was only a Marquis, and yet, three days after his arrival in town, he was the object of every conversation on every floor in every house of every street. The West-end palaces spoke of him, the shops in Regent-street and the Strand repeated all sorts of anecdotes about him, the slums of Whitechapel re-echoed his maltreated name. He was the subject of conversation at St. James's, in Clare Market, at Richmond, and in Hoxton.

And yet no one could boast of having seen this famous Marquis de Rio Santo, about whom every one was talking. He spent in the magnificent solitude of his mansion in Belgrave-square the three or four first days that followed his arrival in England. But what matter for that? There were in the aristocratic drawing-rooms twenty young noblemen who sang his praises and told anecdotes about him sufficient to send society into fits. There were in the middle-class parties, and even in the back parlours and shops, good-looking young men, wielding the yard measure, who bowed the knee at the respected name of the illustrious Marquis; and lastly, before the all-night coffee-stalls, ignoble scamps, who, between their gritty cups, took the same name in vain, though why they did so we are unable to say.

Where men talk ladies gossip. Hence arose that deafening concert which sent up to the cloudy sky of London the name of Rio Santo, a thousand times repeated in doorway, ante-chamber, shop, and garret.

Every one formed an idea of the mysterious Marquis according to the natural bent of his mind. Husbands, deceived by his name and reputation, expected to see the red cloak of Fra Diavolo, or at least the plumed hat of Don Juan. Women endowed his unknown face with that something fatal which the fry of romancers give to these poor devils of heroes. Girls saw him in their dreams with a pensive eye, a wrinkled brow, an aquiline nose, and an infernal but divine nose. Old maids, lastly, fancied that he had three gold rings on each finger, a perfumed wood cane, and charms on his fob-appendage worth thousands.

It may be supposed how much this mystery and uncertainty added to the desire each had to know the Marquis de Rio Santo. This desire, however, did not exceed a certain social latitude, and

was generally confined to the aristocracy and moneyed classes. As if there were not sufficient motives for rivalry, politics interfered, and a vague rumour began spreading in usually well-informed clubs. It was said that this strange Marquis was the secret envoy of a first-class power, his mission being confidential and most important. However, no one could positively affirm the fact, and, for that very reason, it was considered positive and materially proved.

Hence Liberals and Conservatives vied with each other as to who should receive his first visit. Thirty invitations crossed each other, bearing tremendous names, the least of which had at its back a palace and millions. Rio Santo was in no hurry to relent; he allowed himself to be longed for at the proper period, and one evening after his first trip to Richmond, he drove to Lancewood House.

Ophelia, Countess of Lancewood, was the widow of a Knight of the Garter. Her fortune rivalled that of the chief Lombard-street banker. She was only twenty-four years of age, and was considered the most charming woman in Eaton-square, which is very long, and crammed with most charming women.

When Rio Santo was announced a silent thrill ran along the double row of ladies who lined the drawing-rooms of the Countess of Lancewood. The first row quivered with delicious curiosity, the second rank, the "wall flowers," thrust their withered faces between those of the pretty maidens much like the second line of troops firing over the front rank. Rio Santo entered. He was considered a handsome man, but here and there a little disappointment was felt because he did not look sufficiently romantic. At the first blush, surprise was felt that the Marquis, irreproachable though he was, but nothing extraordinary, could have deprived le Comte Blanco for three years running of the sceptre of Parisian fashion—a more poetical manner, a more peculiar attire had been expected. Altogether, the first impression did not satisfy general expectation; but Rio Santo spoke. The charm operated the better and arose rapidly because there had before been a sort of reaction. The young ladies yielded their hearts to the electric current, and the "wall flowers" regretted the happy time when they could have been electrified.

There is in society a prejudice more stupid than all other prejudices. It is supposed that, for a man to be the King of Fashion, it is sufficient for him to be rich, handsome, of a frivolous character, and witless enough to say pretty nothings. This is an utter mistake; the royalty of Fashion can only be obtained by the right of conquest, and a man must possess more

vigorous and sterling qualities than these if he wishes to retain his position.

It was soon allowed that Rio Santo was a man of most versatile powers, and, at the same time, people were dazzled by the luxury he displayed—not like a usurer who had grown rich, but as a genuine great nobleman. Within a few weeks Rio Santo was consequently in London what he had been in Paris, *the* man, the king, the deity.

At the period of his arrival in England several new personages had introduced themselves among the great, bearing illustrious names, and living like gentlemen. We will quote among the new comers Sir Paul Winterfield, Major Bloxam, Dr. Muller, and the Cavalero, Angelo Bembo. All these gentlemen were acquainted with the Marquis, whom they had met at Paris and elsewhere, but not one of them appeared to be admitted to his intimacy.

Rio Santo's first conquest in London was, it was whispered, the Countess of Lancewood. Hitherto this lady had held a reputation most enviable by a young widow. According to the general tongue, she was a woman of marvelous taste, of a very delicate mind, but with a dry heart; a coquette, in short, but one of the most dangerous and least assailable. She was, in addition, a woman of high principle, as religious as was necessary, and bearing without a stain the name of her old husband, one of the noblest and best in the kingdom. In society, where so much scandal is constantly afloat, the Countess was regarded as invulnerable; no spot of the smallest size had tarnished the virgin mirror of her reputation. Men loved and feared her; her rivals envied and hated her. Rio Santo having arrived, the Countess's life was suddenly wrapped up in an unusual mystery, which wicked tongues soon began to render suspicious. She ought to have defended herself by raising the veil, and allowing the crowd to watch how every hour of her life was spent. But it was true that she loved Rio Santo passionately, madly, and imprudently.

Rio Santo, for his part, loved powerfully and rapidly, but his passion burned too fiercely to last; he threw himself at the Countess's feet, and promised to sacrifice everything for her sake. But Rio Santo, though he never intended falsehood, deceived himself very often. He yielded to love unreservedly, just as children give away their toys to their companions, to take them back again directly. His was, as some poets would say, a magnificent nature; but Heaven guard you, ladies, from meeting with Rio Santos!

## CHAPTER V.

### HOW LOVE COMES IN A DREAM

ALL fashionable London busied itself for a week with the marriage of Rio Santo and the Countess of Lancewood. They were a well-matched couple, but, for all that, the marriage did not come off. Rio Santo declared that he had been unsuccessful; some believed this declaration, but others thought that he had succeeded too well.

One day he met Miss Trevor, and thought that this pale person, with her inexpressive beauty, was a very insignificant young lady. Perhaps he did not even trouble himself about her so much as that. Mary herself felt ill at ease in the presence of this gentleman, whose strange renown terrified her. A second time they met. Mary was singing; and her voice, sweet, but without compass, smote on Rio Santo's ear with a wishywashily sound. But the Marquis spoke, and his ringing voice painfully affected Miss Trevor's delicate ear.

A third time they met at a concert given by Lady Lancewood. That evening Rio Santo was pale, silent, and looking round him absently. Miss Trevor, seated next to Miss Diana Stewart, her best friend, in a card-room not yet invaded by the players, was conversing in a low voice. Diana was the cousin, and had been the childish playmate of Frank Percival, whom a journey detained far from Miss Trevor, his betrothed. The two girls, of course, were speaking about him. Rio Santo, who was leaning against a pillar that half concealed him, was within listening distance, but did not hear. Mary had her back towards him, and could not perceive him. Gradually the young ladies, who at first spoke in a low voice, ceased to observe the precaution, because they fancied themselves afar from any indiscreet listener. Their con-

versation reached Rio Santo's ear like a murmur. However, he did not notice it, for he was greedily enjoying the respite the curious attention of the crowd allowed him. Presently he muttered:

"Mary, sweet Mary!"

"Poor Mary!" Diana Stewart exclaimed at the same moment; then she added, with a pretty laugh, "So you love him, then?"

At the name of Mary, Rio Santo opened his eyes, and looked round at Miss Trevor's graceful profile. He had already seen her, but fancied that he saw her now for the first time. Perhaps her tender and sweet smile chimed in with his reverie; perhaps some distant resemblance to an endeared one struck him. In a second he made up his mind that Mary Trevor should be his, and with him to determine a thing was to succeed.

Mary hesitated a moment before answering Diana's question.

"I have been sad since his departure, and await his return impatiently," she said at length.

Rio Santo enjoyed the harmony of this voice, though he had despised it but yesterday. He admired its sweetness, and the very weakness of the organ charmed him, for it struck in some remote corner of his heart a chord which had ceased vibrating for years.

He made a move; Miss Trevor turned, and her pale cheek became crimson. She guessed that her answer had been heard Affected by that terror which had assailed her at the first sight of the Marquis, she trembled from head to foot and seized Diana's arm.

"Come!" she said, as she drew her astonished friend away to the concert room.

"Was there a serpent behind your chair?" Miss Stewart asked pleasantly.

"There was a man——," Mary murmured.

Diana turned sharply in her turn, and observed the ardent glances with which Rio Santo followed her companion. She became serious.

"How wickedly he looks after you," she said with simple envy. "Fire seems to flash from his eyes upon you."

Mary trembled worse than before.

Rio Santo quitted his ambush, and seated himself on the sofa just left by Miss Trevor. He remained there a long time, and did not return to the concert-room till a number of whist players entered for the purpose of play.

"Poor Mary!" he muttered, as he rose; "I have never loved again as I did then.'

A few days after, Rio Santo was introduced to Lady Champbell and Lord Trevor. Lady Champbell was just the woman to appreciate all the qualities of the handsome Marquis. She was flattered by his eagerness to form her acquaintance, and foresaw that her worldly importance would be augmented by it. Trevor House, in fact, suddenly became the fashion; everybody wished to be presented there, and the gentlemen we saw arrive in London nearly at the same time as Rio Santo were the first to obtain the honour.

No sooner were they in Lord Trevor's house than they surrounded Lady Champbell, and paid her assiduous court. These four gentlemen, though on terms of acquaintanceship, did not appear to be intimate, and yet it seemed as if they had made an agreement to help Rio Santo on with Lady Champbell. It was possibly accidental.

Rio Santo, however, did not require assistance. The cleverer a woman is, the less chance she has to escape the seductions of her mind, and, as we have already said, Lady Champbell was inferior to none in delicacy of mind. Within a few days she regarded Rio Santo as a friend of the family—in a month she only saw with his eyes. As my lady was in reality the head of her brother's house, everybody underwent more or less Rio Santo's influence—everybody, not excepting Miss Trevor herself.

We are bound to say, however, that Rio Santo did not act directly on Miss Trevor. It was Lady Champbell who unconsciously took the trouble to work on the malleable heart of her pretty niece. This amiable lady, who was full of the Marquis's perfections, could not hold her tongue. Her warm friendship—her admiration oozed through every pore. She presented Rio Santo to her niece as a subject for study, a perfect model, which, when understood, would complete her knowledge of the world. "He was good," she would say, "though he held so high a rank, which rendered his goodness sublime, for he was so powerful to do harm." Every month large sums were handed over to some district clergyman, and hundreds of poor people had bread. He was inconstant—light of love; but who said it?—if rivals, it was false—if women, it was rancour, and besides, why was he wearied by so much homage—could he regard seriously favours so imprudently lavished?

The result was, that Miss Trevor felt ashamed of her past terror. She felt for Rio Santo a species of admiration, with which an undefinable fear was mingled, but it was no longer repulsion. She knew that the Marquis loved her. When a woman knows that, and yet passes from aversion to something stronger than

indifference, we may bet that she will love. It is a question of time, and we shall presently see whether we should have won our wager with Mary Trevor.

All at once an extravagant rumour spread through London. It excited the attention of everybody who had a pretence to the name of gentleman from one end of London to the other. Wives talked about it with their lovers, husbands with their wives' intimate female acquaintances, and the very servants chattered about it.

Rio Santo, it was said, was going to marry! Marry like the most simple of mortals, come to an end, break his sceptre, hack off his spurs, change his poetry into prose, and draw a nightcap over his crown. It was a clumsy, ridiculous, impossible invention of the enemy, but it was true!

When the rumour spread, Rio Santo had already asked for Miss Trevor's hand.

Contrary to custom, he had met several obstacles, the smallest of which was not to be disdained. In the first place, Lady Champbell, who was the soul of honour, refused, in spite of her inclinations, to lend her aid to the Marquis. The mutual attachment of Frank Percival and her niece was her handiwork; she had prepared their union. Abandoning the interests of absent Frank would be treachery, and Lady Champbell was incapable of it. In the second place, Lord Trevor, an old and chivalrous gentleman, had pledged his word to Frank. Thirdly and lastly, Miss Trevor loved this same Frank.

Hence the Marquis received a triple refusal. Still, he was not really affected by it, for his long habit of success did not permit him to despair; but he called up the unconcern quite Spartan in vogue, kissed Lady Champbell's hand, and stalked icily away, like a man not at all afraid of displaying a weakness.

Lady Champbell was in despair. She bitterly repented having passed her word to Frank, who, though a distinguished young man, was as nothing compared with Rio Santo. But regret is a most foolish thing, and Lady Champbell was not the woman to throw away her time. Fortunately, women of superior mind have ever a last resource at their service—it is to deceive themselves.

Lady Champbell being herself in despair, naturally believed that Mary was heart-broken. This was not exactly correct, but it was possible. Once Miss Trevor's grief was admitted, it could be interpreted in many ways, and Lady Champbell chose her own. She said to herself that her niece was in love, that she loved Rio Santo, and that the rejection of the latter caused the poor child's grief.

She said this to herself several times without believing it, but soon believed it. Believing it, she had undoubtedly the right to make another person share her belief, and to whom could she communicate her impressions save to her beloved niece, her adopted daughter?

At the first overture Mary was astounded, but Lady Champbell was of such good faith and had such eloquence! Mary, weak, accustomed not to question her heart rigorously, and also accustomed to make her aunt's every idea her own without examination, allowed herself to be persuaded.

The fact may seem strange, but it happens every day.

Henceforth Lady Champbell was at her ease, and regained all her serenity. The position had greatly changed, it must be allowed. It was no longer a matter affecting herself, but her niece. She would have acted culpably by listening to her own feelings and breaking her word—but her niece! Through exaggerated good faith, the happiness of a girl must not be sacrificed like that! Far from hesitating any longer, she felt herself bound by honour; what had seemed to her a weakness was now a strict duty; she confessed to herself that, under these circumstances, she must not stop half way, but do her best to aid Rio Santo.

Miss Trevor, it is true, lived at that time in a state of constant bewilderment, full of fatigues and weariness. Rio Santo had produced a strange impression on her, which she could not define; as the duenna called it love, it must be so.

And yet Frank Percival's image remained at the bottom of her heart. Poor Mary hesitated and knew not what to do. Crushed by Lady Champbell's infallibility, which she dared not dispute, advised, too, by the weakness of her character, she fell asleep in this strange doubt. She suffered silently and without seeking a remedy; and she made an effort at times to stifle the murmurs of her heart, and assume the repose of apathy in place of her lost tranquillity.

There still remained to be overcome the opposition which Lord Trevor, faithful as steel, and adhering to his pledged word, would not fail to offer to this new arrangement. It could not be done directly, but that was the least thing, after all. When a woman has succeeded in deceiving herself, deluding a young girl's conscience, and retaining her own peace of mind, she may have reasonable hope of defeating an old gentleman, more used to the battle-field than the silken carpets of diplomacy.

Rio Santo was admitted to declare his feelings to Miss Trevor, who, during the whole of the following night, dreamed of Frank Percival.

It must be allowed that this young gentleman had badly chosen his time for travelling. It is usually the case at his age, when parents, in order to prove their superior wisdom, put off a desirable union under the pretext that it is not time for it yet.

Poor wisdom—poor pretext! There is a moment to be happy, and if you let it slip, saying, "It is not the time," or some other absurdity, the devil grins and scores one. Frank Percival, accepted by the whole Trevor family, was the declared husband of Mary, but she was too young. "Wait a year," they told him. Frank asked himself how he could wait three hundred and sixty-five days without dying seven hundred and thirty times. One of his friends—for when a man is to break his neck it is always a kind friend that helps him—recommended him to go and do the Alps again. Frank did so—he remained away a year, and came express from Geneva, so as to arrive in London exactly on the three hundred and sixty-fifth day.

Such punctuality deserved to be rewarded as it was. At the moment he reached home his housekeeper handed him a note dated a week back, inviting him to spend that very evening at Trevor House.

Frank had only just time to dress—it was that very evening the ball took place at Trevor House.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE BALL

TREVOR HOUSE, one of those few palaces peculiar to London, stands in its own grounds. The principal front looks out on magnificent clumps of trees, behind which is a large lawn, with a row of shrubs concealing the wall that divides the grounds from Park Lane; and this garden, which is very large, is rendered still larger by its skilful laying out. It is, in fact, a splendid residence, which makes you regret the magnificence of past ages, and look with contempt on the comfortable but restricted buildings that compose modern West London.

On this evening the lofty windows were brilliantly lit up, and the hour for the ball to open had struck. The rooms were gradually filling, and the band, led by some King of the Dance, were tuning their instruments. The dancing had not yet begun; but the rows of arm-chairs were beginning to fill—the principal drawing-room especially, in which was Lady Champbell, who already looked very charming and seemed a half-filled basket, only requiring a few more flowers to render it perfect.

Lady Champbell and the heiress, surrounded by a large group, which was incessantly renewed, bowed and smiled, received compliments and returned them. Such is the agreeable occupation of the lady of the house on a ball night from ten o'clock till midnight.

"Do me the favour to permit me, Madam," said the middle-aged Viscount de Lantures-Luces, as he raised Lady Champbell's hand to within half an inch of his lips, and pretended to kiss it. "Allow me, Miss Trevor, to compliment you on your exquisite fan. I am speaking seriously."

"Viscount," Lady Champbell said with a smile, "that is the seventh time my niece's fan has delighted you."

The group that surrounded the ladies at the moment could not refrain from laughing, and the old Viscount's laugh was the loudest of all.

"Adorable," he simpered, "seven times, seven times exquisite—so it is."

But here the group did not laugh, which greatly surprised the Viscount, who, in his disappointment, stammered in his shirt frill—

"I speak very seriously."

Lady Champbell bowed three or four times to the right and left; she gave her hand to the Countess of Lancewood, who came in at the moment, while Mary welcomed Diana Stewart.

"Ah, Winterfield," Lady Champbell asked one of the new arrivals, "have you any news for us?"

"There is a rumour," Sir Paul replied, "that the Marquis de Rio Santo has ordered new carriages and furniture."

"Are you speaking seriously?" the Viscount asked; "why, it is not three months ago since he renewed them."

"The Marquis has his reasons."

"Our dear Rio Santo told me nothing about it," muttered the Viscount, whose mania it was to pass for everybody's most intimate friend.

"And what are the reasons?" Lady Champbell began.

"A marriage," Major Bloxam answered; "that is the great news of the moment."

Mary lost the artificial smile she had previously fixed on her lips. Her head suddenly burned, and her hand turned cold. Lady Champbell took a side glance at her.

"How she loves him!" she thought.

Miss Trevor was thinking of Frank Percival, whom she no longer loved, as it was a settled affair, but who occupied her thoughts from morn to night, side by side with Rio Santo, for Mary had come to give the Marquis half her mind, if not half her heart. Rio Santo had produced on her an impression difficult to explain, which was not love, though it often had the symptoms. Hence, the counsels of her tutress aiding, Mary, not knowing how to define the feeling the Marquis inspired her with, was able to doubt, even believe, and take her constant pre-occupation for love. But, as may be supposed, this artificial belief only attacked the young lady's mind, and not her heart, which kept the first affection in a latent state. Lady Champbell had placed her word as a thick veil between her niece's heart and her intellect. The heart, being blinded, had fallen into an apathetic slumber.

My lady took pity on Mary, and did not ask the name of Rio Santo's future wife.

"The Marquis is greatly changed," went on Angelo Bembo.

"He is hardly to be recognised," Major Bloxam added.

Sir Paul made a similar remark, and Dr. Muller gave one of those guttural grunts by which Germans express their approval.

"What is the matter with the dear Marquis?" the Viscount de Lantures-Luces asked eagerly.

"He is in love!" the four gentlemen answered in chorus.

"A three days affair," the Viscount remarked.

"For life," Major Bloxam said gravely.

Miss Trevor gave a start of pride and a shudder of agony: of pride because she was a daughter of Eve, and there was not, perhaps, throughout all London a woman who would have refrained from it on seeing Rio Santo at her feet. The agony was a vague protest of the heart, a semi-awakening, a stifled cry of the conscience.

The Viscount broke into a laugh as long and noisy as the place permitted.

"Delicious!" he exclaimed. "I am speaking very seriously."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE LOVER'S RECEPTION

THE dancing began, and Angelo Bembo offered Miss Trevor his arm to lead her to the quadrille. There was a general movement in the rooms: the groups became mingled, and Lady Champbell, without losing her male court, was surrounded by a circle of ladies—of those ladies who form a sort of transition between the active and the passive portion of a ball; between the "wall flowers" and their brilliant border—of those ladies, in a word, whom the law of society does not rigorously forbid dancing, but who do not venture to dance always.

The conversation went on—frivolous, spiteful, and witty. Lady Champbell uttered some charming remarks, the Viscount de Lantures-Luces some delectable old gallantries, and Dr. Muller some fearful Anglo-Germanic solecisms.

"Really, when our Marquis is absent," Lady Champbell said, with imperceptible mockery, "M. de Lantures-Luces is the providence of our parties."

"Why place the Viscount in the second rank?" a Baroness asked.

"Certainly," a Right Honourable's wife added, "the Marquis would only feel proud of the comparison."

"Ah, ladies!" Lantures-Luces stammered; "be merciful, grant me quarter. I am too great a friend of the dear Marquis to pretend——"

'No modesty, Viscount; you always have some witty story in reserve."

"Some biting anecdote——"

"Some bit of harmless scandal——"

'Oh, ladies! you flatter me. I speak sincerely."

The Viscount could hold out no longer. He was in Heaven. He was a little, middle-aged Frenchman, of the ordinary height,

and with an ordinary face. His hair, curly and pomaded, formed a horse-shoe round his narrow forehead. His dress had something pretentious about it, though it bore no resemblance to the "victorious" costume of polo-pony-jumping dandies. In any other drawing-room it would have passed muster, but at Trevor House the supreme elegance of simplicity was alone admissible. To complete the Viscount's portrait, we need only say that he was fond of hearing himself talk, and lisped outrageously, that he smiled like a man sure of his smile, and wore double eye-glasses, which he managed with some skill.

The turn the conversation had taken was, therefore, a perfect triumph for him. He defended himself weakly against the praise, and turned over in his mind an anecdote prepared long before to sustain his reputation as a conversationalist.

"Come, Viscount," Lady Champbell went on; "modesty becomes you very well; but nothing must be exaggerated, not even virtues. I am sure that you have some story for us."

"Hear, hear!" was exclaimed on all sides. The Viscount allowed himself to be entreated for three minutes.

"I should have preferred not to tell it," he at length began. "I speak very seriously, because the story relates to our dear Rio Santo."

"The Marquis! Tell it us; pray make haste!" It was a chorus of feminine voices that pronounced these words.

"It is an old story," the Viscount went on; "but I only heard it to-day from a Parisian. It is rather droll, I might almost say it is very droll."

"Pray out with it."

"Just imagine, fair ladies, that during Rio Santo's stay in Paris, the Countess L—— and the Countess P—— were in love with our dear Marquis. One day the police sergeant in the Bois heard two shots fired. He rushed up and saw——: you can now guess what!"

"An assassination?"

"No."

"Persons firing at a mark?"

"No. A duel, ladies! A duel between the Countess P—— and the Countess L——."

"How absurdly ridiculous," the chorus exclaimed, with a loud outburst of laughter.

"A duel between two Countesses in a party!" said Sir Paul! "It is only Rio Santo who can cause such fantasies."

"Wait a moment. The best joke is the motive for the duel. Just imagine, fair ladies, that the two Countesses had made an

agreement, so soon as one of them effected the conquest of the Marquis, the other would give up and abandon all claims."

"Why, that is turning the world topsy-turvy," Lady Champbell interrupted; "those two females disgrace their sex."

"And disgrace the nobility," the latest titled judge's wife added.

"Not at all, not at all, ladies," Lantures-Luces exclaimed; "chance wills it that they are simply and purely Countesses of the last Empire."

"Very good."

"These two ladies, then, had formed an agreement," the little Viscount went on; "at the end of a week the battle seemed decided, for the Countess L——'s carriage had been seen standing for two hours at Rio Santo's door. Madame de P—— gave up a whole day to her despair, on the next she made inquiries, and acquired the certainty that her rival had imitated those delicious rogues of the Regency who compromised a woman by sending their empty carriage to her door. The Countess L—— had defamed Rio Santo."

"What a thoroughly French idea!" the chorus broke forth.

"You can understand, fair ladies," Lantures-Luces went on, "that the Countess P—— became furious. The first time she met her enemy in a drawing-room, she said to her, 'Madam, you are an impostor of love.'"

"That Countess P—— had some cleverness about her," said Lady Champbell.

"The Countess L——, like a true member of our latest Empire, retorted by a blow of her fan on the cheek. 'Enough,' said Countess P——. 'No case for the tribunals, but your weapon?'—'Pistols.' 'The hour?'—'Noon.' 'To-morrow, then, at the Bois, without witnesses. A duel to the death.'"

"What dragons of women!"

"Our Rio Santo," said Sir Paul, "can convert lambs into tigers like Medea's brew."

The "Boston" was drawing to a close, and the Cavalero Angelo Bembo led Miss Trevor back to her seat. She was scarcely seated by her aunt's side ere the toast-masterly voice of the usher, overpowering all the noises of the festival, bellowed the name of the Honourable Frank Percival.

Miss Trevor at once lost the delicate hue which the dance had brought to her cheek; she became paler than a marble statue, and laid her hand on her sinking heart. Lady Champbell bent over her and whispered:

"Courage, my daughter; poor Frank fancies he has a claim,

and the interview will be painful; but you were so young. Your heart was deceived. Who knows, too, whether Frank may not have changed?"

The last sentence, meant for a consolation, brought a tear to Miss Trevor's eye.

"No weakness," Lady Champbell continued; "if he sees a woman weep, a man believes in a remnant of affection. And you do not love him now," she added, with real anxiety.

Mary gave no reply.

"How could you love him still?" Lady Champbell added. "Poor Frank, it is a great misfortune for him that the arrival in London of our irresistible Marquis——"

The clever woman said no more, and, by our thinking, had it not been for her, her niece would have misunderstood the cry of her heart, would have combated in vain and in silence her love for the Marquis, have married Frank through timidity, and have been wretched—perhaps a mere lady!

Imagination is a sublime thing.

Lady Champbell had never before felt so satisfied with herself; as for Miss Trevor, never before had she suffered so cruelly.

Frank Percival was greeted by Lord Trevor with a frank and glad cordiality; the old Lord himself led him up to his daughter; but here the scene changed, Mary received her betrothed with a coldness all the greater because her suddenly awakened heart rushed towards him with greater impulse. The mere name of Frank had shaken her torpidity, and rent the diabolical veil in which her free will had been enveloped, and the sight of him completed the metaphysical cure. The cataract which obstructed Mary's sight—the sight of her heart—fell off all at once; she saw, and was astonished and terrified at seeing thus clearly into herself. Then, by a sudden and necessary reaction, she revolted against the despotic hand that had blinded her. But she was weak, she was subdued; the negro slave only discovers his courage at night in the dense forest, when his master's formidable eye does not follow him; her duenna was by Mary's side.

Mary bowed again. Her hardly-opened eyes closed once more; she behaved as does the black slave when night disappears and he hears the overseer's whip; she stifled her desire to complain, and became passive again.

Miss Trevor let her eyes fall beneath Frank's glance, and only answered his compliments by stammering a few unconnected words. Frank felt himself attacked by a cruel fear: he prepared

to speak again; but Lady Champbell touched him lightly on the shoulder with her fan.

"Have you had a pleasant journey?" she said.

Then, suddenly changing her tone, she bent over to his ear and whispered,

"No emotion this evening, I entreat you; there are eyes upon her and upon us."

Frank did not understand.

"To-morrow," Lady Champbell continued, in a voice so full of pity, that Frank could no longer be mistaken, "to-morrow I will explain all to you; believe me that I am still your friend, dear Frank—the poor child resisted the spell, but she has suffered."

"What," Frank exclaimed, "am I to suppose?"

"I implore you, Mr. Percival, wait till to-morrow."

At the same time the matchmaker took Frank's hand, which she pressed with unfeigned sensibility. He bowed and retired with death in his heart.

"Miss Trevor did me the honour to promise me the next," Major Bloxam said, as the orchestra began the first notes.

Mary remained motionless, annihilated.

"You will be kind enough to excuse my niece, Major," said Lady Champbell, who had an eye for everything; before the end of the ball she will keep her engagement."

A singular smile played under Major Bloxam's moustache.

"Rio Santo is very late," he whispered to Dr. Muller. The Doctor replied in a low tone and in the purest English, without a trace of the Teutonic,

"He reckons on this ingenious Lady Champbell, and deuce take me if he is not right; without her, I would not answer for the little one."

"She is feeling her way—she does not know exactly; I fancy she loves the other."

"Nonsense; she has a heart, perhaps; but two eyes are one too many against the heart. There is the aunt besides."

The aunt was saying to her niece, "My child, the worst is over. The rest concerns me. Ah! If it were not for your sake, Mary, I would decline this negotiation. Poor Frank! but your happiness is at stake, and I will devote myself, dear girl."

She kissed Miss Trevor's forehead, which was cold and damp.

"Are you ill, my love?" she asked, anxiously.

"I do not know," Mary answered. "I am distressed——"

"What do you fear, my child?"

"That we are both mistaken; the sight of Frank——"

"Is that all?" Lady Champbell interrupted, at once recovering

her serenity. "Trust to me, my daughter. Ah, you are very fortunate, Mary, that I was able to read your heart."

Frank wandered about the rooms, seeking to repulse the painful thoughts that oppressed his mind; he wished still to hope. After all, Lord Trevor's greeting had been as cordial as formerly, and Lady Champbell's remarks permitted more than one interpretation. But, Mary? Was it possible to mistake that icy coldness which had succeeded the gentle manner of former days? Was a doubt still permissible? Frank certainly tried to combat the thought; but the crushing evidence reduced his efforts to impotence.

Here and there his friends stopped him to press his hand and welcome him.

"What news from the Simplon?" one asked. "You must show me your sketchbook, old chappie," said another.

"How sad you look," a third exclaimed. "Can you already have learnt——"

This one Frank eagerly interrupted.

"What?" he asked, with ardent anxiety.

"Poor fellow!" his friend exclaimed; "but there is nothing in the *Post* as yet—they are simple reports——"

"What do they say?"

"They say—but perhaps they are wrong—that Miss Trevor is going to marry Rio Santo."

Frank passed his hand over his forehead. "Who is this Rio Santo?" he asked.

His friend looked at him in amazement.

"Have you never heard of Rio Santo, Frank? What do they talk about in Cheeseland? Rio Santo is a Portuguese Marquis; but good-bye, Percy, my poor fellow. I see Sir Paul making me a sign that he wants a fourth at whist."

Frank remained alone, stunned by this new blow

"Oh! good evening, my dear fellow," a falsetto voice said at his ear; "it is an age since we have seen you, and I was only saying yesterday—who was it I said it to? Oh, to the dear Marquis, of course; I said to him, 'It is an age since we have seen Frank; he must be ensnared by some book-keeper in a condensed milk factory.' Of course, there are no milkmaids now, eh? I am speaking seriously, I said so. But you look grieved. You have been told that Rio Santo——"

"It is true, then?" Frank muttered.

"My dear fellow, I know nothing serious, save that Rio Santo is such a clever fellow—and then, he has more millions than you have hundreds. Oh! he is a terrible rival."

The Viscount de Lantures-Luces pirouetted on his heel, and went to evaporate libel elsewhere. Frank walked on without seeing, tottering like a drunken man; he felt a lady's arm pass through his.

"Mr. Percival," the Countess of Lancewood said to him, "you are unhappy, very unhappy. I pity you, for, of course, you already know——"

"I know all, Madam."

"All! No, Mr. Percival, you do not know all. Listen. I, too, am suffering. I should like to relieve your pain, and, perhaps——"

There is a demon of conceit lurking at the bottom of every man's heart. Frank, in spite of his sorrow, misunderstood, and gazed at the Countess with surprise. She smiled sadly, continuing—

"Perhaps I shall give you the means to fight Rio Santo, for he is not to be conquered with ordinary weapons."

"Rio Santo seems to be everything," Frank thought, as he felt a furious and unbounded hatred filling his heart.

"Come and see me to-morrow," the Countess went on; "the things I have to tell you must be said in a whisper and with closed doors—in a room where only two are present, and the person who speaks is in peril as much as the listener. To-morrow, Mr. Percival."

She bowed gracefully, and with a smile as of one ending a frivolous interview. Frank had not so much strength, his distress was legible on each of his features; he walked on in search of a chair, in which he fell. Diana Stewart, his cousin, saw and beckoned him.

"Sit down by my side, Frank," she said, "I have many things to say to you. Oh! I knew that you would feel this blow cruelly."

"You are her friend," muttered Frank, who found a difficulty in speaking; "you must be acquainted with her heart—tell me——"

"I will tell you all I know, my poor cousin; but make an effort, and recall your courage."

"Diana—speak to me of her; I am waiting."

"She suffers as much as yourself, Frank, believe me. There is something going on which I do not understand, but her heart has not changed. Mary loves you still."

A thrill of ecstatic happiness passed over Percival's wounded mind.

"But yet this marriage?" he said.

"It is talked about; Lady Champbell desires it, and Mary does not oppose it. That is all."

"She does not oppose it!" Frank repeated mechanically.

"Rio Santo has bewitched them."

"Rio Santo again—do you know this person, Diana?"

"I do," she replied, looking down with a blush.

"Point him out to me—tell me what he is like?"

"He is a man whom nobody can resist," the young lady said in a whisper; "a handsome, noble, strong man, whom other men can only resemble at a distance—woe to his rivals, Frank."

"Woe to him, rather!" Percival interrupted, as he rose with terrible fury; "point him out to me, I say. Oh! I must see this Don Giovanni face to face——"

The monotonous and sonorous voice of the door warder interrupted Frank by announcing emphatically:

"Don José Maria Telles de Alarcaon, Marquis of Rio Santo."

This name, so pompously announced through the room, sent a chill to Frank's heart, for the coincidence was strange. But he suddenly shook off his torpor, and cleft his way hurriedly through the crowd. He instinctively stopped half way from the door leading into the room where Lady Champbell and Miss Trevor were sitting. He guessed at once that Rio Santo would pass that way.

The Marquis, in fact, at once appeared. He was a man of great height and heroic appearance. His face, with its firm and elegantly-marked features, had that expression of superhuman calmness admired in some Italian faces, though to a less extent. He was handsome—handsome as the great artist's dream—a king or a deity. The fine oval of his cheek displayed no hair, and he merely wore a slight moustache, as black as the raven's wing, and turned up after the fashion of the Spaniards. His hair, which curled naturally, did not affect any precise style, but it was combed off a wide forehead, full of frankness and pride. His eyes charmed and commanded beneath the boldly-marked arch of his black eyebrows.

Only one thing in this magnificent face could have offended a strict observer. There was in Rio Santo's look the mark of sensuality, which, if suddenly irritated, would know no bounds, and attain furious and frenzied proportions. But where is the face in which observers do not discover a thousand motives for suspicion or fear?

Rio Santo's step was regal, but his majesty was allied to an inimitable grace. He wore a simple dress, irreproachable

in its elegance, and three desirable orders glistened on his breast.

The announcement of his name raised a stifled murmur in the crowd. Some ladies made a mistake in the figures. Others forgot to answer the conventional questions of their partners. The murmur soon died out, but the emotion remained. There was an element more in the room, and each feminine heart felt its coquettish instincts heightened.

Frank Percival could not be compared to the Marquis as regarded external advantages. He was handsome too, but his beauty did not consist so much in the regularity of his features, as the noble appearance of intellect and generosity which illumined his honest brow. There was in him something chivalrous: his timidity was haughty, but it was courteous. In a word, he would have been the king of this society if Rio Santo had not been present.

Percival was much younger than the Marquis, though the latter was one of those men on whom age leaves no trace, and whom Time seems to forget in his passage. It would have been impossible to say precisely how many years weighed upon Rio Santo's forehead. Still, that bloom of youth which Frank's features retained was not to be found on him.

Percival looked at his rival fixedly and for a long time as he barred the narrow passage the crowd had opened. At the first glance, it struck him that he had already seen this face, but the impression was short and transient; what he saw and remarked with passionate jealousy was Rio Santo's extraordinary beauty.

He still looked at him so as to bar his passage. Rio Santo at first checked his pace, then stopped all at once, looking for Lady Champbell and her niece. He had not even perceived Percival.

"Over there, Marquis, over there!" cried the officious Viscount de Lentures-Luces, as he pointed out the corner of the room where Lady Champbell was sitting; "the ladies are complaining about the delay. Come, Percival, my dear fellow, have the goodness to let the Marquis and myself go by."

Percival did not stir, but assumed the most menacing expression he was capable of. Rio Santo looked at him quietly, and merely replied to his dumb challenge by a courteous bow.

"I will try to obtain the honour of an introduction to Mr. Percival," he said simply.

And before the Viscount had rendered matters worse by his inopportune interference, the Marquis gave a scarcely perceptible hiss to a person who had just entered, and out of whose way everybody moved cautiously.

This person, who is an acquaintance of ours, one whom his faultless ball coat could not free from the insignificant appearance nature had bestowed upon him, walked with head aloft and widely-opened eyes, never turning to avoid a collision, or bow to an acquaintance.

It was the blind man of the Crown Arms.

At Rio Santo's faint whistle, he changed his course, and planted himself right in front of Percival, thus concealing the Marquis.

"I'll trouble you to move aside, sir," Percival said angrily.

The blind man turned to him, covering him with his fixed and dead eyes.

"Are you speaking to me?" he said gently.

"I am, sir, and I consider it strange——"

"Come, come, my dear fellow," the Viscount said with a loud laugh, "what is the matter with you to-night? You are not surely going to pick a quarrel with Sir Edmund Mackenzie, a blind gentleman."

"I must apologise," Percival muttered as he bit his lips and looked after Rio Santo, while the blind man remarked benignly:

"It is I, sir, who ask your pardon."

Rio Santo had disappeared in the crowd.

"Can he be a coward?" Percival asked himself.

He looked about the rooms, for he considered it strange that the Marquis had so eagerly taken advantage of the opportunity for escaping.

"Can he be a coward?" he repeated. "I wanted him to be brave."

"You will have your wish realised, young gentleman," a mocking voice in his ear interrupted.

Percival turned quickly. There was no one near him but a tall, foreign-looking gentleman, who was carefully wiping the glasses of a gigantic pair of blue spectacles.

"What did you say?" the young man asked haughtily.

"Ich? I said nodings," the tall personage replied, phlegmatically, who was none other than Dr. Muller.

"You spoke to me, sir."

"I did not schpoke a vord, dunder!" the German replied as he turned his back.

Percival supposed he must be mistaken; besides, he had something else to think about. Rio Santo had found Lady Champbell and her niece, and the corner of the room where they were seated suddenly became the centre of the ball. All eyes turned towards it, and Lady Champbell's court was instantaneously doubled.

She received and welcomed the new comer like a beloved and admired son.

"Mary was becoming sad," she said, while Rio Santo kissed the young lady's hand.

"Was it merely my absence that caused Miss Trevor's sorrow?" Rio Santo asked with a smile.

The heiress tried to smile too, but could not. Her wretchedness was complicated by the presence of the Marquis, who had not lost the mysterious power from the beginning exercised over her. This evening he was more attentive, tender, and eloquent than usual. Mary, whom an inner voice warned to reflect, yielded to the enchantment spread round her by this man she did not love, and forgot Percival, whom she did love. It was more than fascination, and Miss Stewart had employed the right word. Mary was bewitched.

Lady Propriety listened to Rio Santo, and made him the most witty answers, and still found time to show ecstacies at her niece's happiness. The Viscount performed enthusiastic grimaces at each remark of his illustrious model, and promised himself to repeat them at the first opportunity.

Percival was standing in a window recess. He was too far off to hear anything; but he saw all, and drank with poignant avidity the bitter cup of jealousy. He looked on, interpreting each gesture, and giving each movement a meaning that doubled his sufferings. When Rio Santo bent over to Mary and fixed on her all the magic of his eye, the Englishman fancied he read in it a timid love, but eloquent in its silence, and his rage became agony.

The hours passed away, and only one thing diverted Percival's incessant watch. At the moment when the conversation reached its greatest animation, Rio Santo—doubtless carried away by his fervour—frowned for an instant, and the light of a chandelier fell directly on his face. Percival started, and asked himself for the second time where he had seen this man before. But Rio Santo's features regained their general appearance, and Percival doubted again. The reminiscence that flashed across his mind was connected with an event so horrible, his memory, through a resemblance real or imaginary, had looked so hideous a picture, that hatred itself, or, what is worse, jealousy could not find room in it for Rio Santo's serene and noble face. The watcher thought himself mistaken, and he thought so the more firmly because it would be madness to suppose the contrary. A terrible misfortune had formerly befallen him under strange circumstances, and the man who played the chief part in this frightful event resembled Rio

Santo as a pauper may resemble a prince. Percival rejected this thought; he had sufficient fresh motives for hatred without calling to his mind long-past outrages, now recalled by a fancied resemblance.

Hence he surrendered his whole soul to his present wrath; it was concentrated entirely on the Marquis, leaving Mary alone, for he knew her weak and malleable character. At length Rio Santo rose to pay his respects to the ladies. The Englishman who was impatiently awaiting this moment, quitted his post and approached him.

"Sir," he said, with that assumed calmness which a man of the world always knows how to put on even in the greatest emotion, "you expressed just now a desire to be introduced to me."

Rio Santo did not recognise him at first. When he did so, he smiled and held out his hand.

"Mr. Percival," he said, "in truth, I could not but desire to form the acquaintance of a gentleman about whom Lady Champbell has often spoken to me with a mother's affection, and whom Miss Trevor loves like a beloved brother."

Percival took Rio Santo's hand and squeezed it powerfully.

"Have you already grown to love all she loves?" he asked, with a bitter smile. "You have the best of the game, sir; and, against my wish, I play the part of the forgotten lover, who is in everybody's way, and whom everybody despises or pities. I love Miss Trevor, sir!"

Rio Santo did not withdraw his hand.

"I knew it," he said, in a cold but exquisitely-modulated tone. "Lady Champbell told me. I hoped—we hoped that absence—"

"In whose name do you speak, sir?"

"I speak for myself, for Lady Champbell——"

"That is all, sir, that is all," Frank again interrupted him in an imperious voice. "I shall declare you a liar if you utter another name!"

"And for Miss Trevor too," Rio Santo said sternly. At the same time he extricated his hand and laid his finger on his lip. His glance remained calm; not a wrinkle appeared on his forehead.

"Mr. Percival," he continued freely, "I do not think I have mistaken your meaning. I should have liked your friendship, but you have decided otherwise; let it be as you wish."

Frank flushed with pleasure.

"To-morrow, then, sir," he said, "it is my wish that one of us dies somehow by the other's hand, and I thank Heaven that I find a brave man in you, who rises above law and legal trammels."

Rio Santo paid his respects to the ladies, and seated himself again by Mary's side.

"I saw you talking with Frank Percival," Lady Champbell said to him in a whisper, and with great anxiety.

"I was drawing him out. Reserved at the beginning, like most Englishmen; but he gets warm upon better acquaintance," Rio Santo answered.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE BARMAID

THE card given by Dark Tyrrel to Susannah, the beautiful barmaid, the previous night, on the banks of the Thames, bore the address, "No. —, Wimpole Street."

At mid-day, Susannah, exact to the appointment, walked up the steps and lifted the heavy knocker of the mansion, of very handsome appearance, and she did not require to repeat her summons. The door opened exactly as the knocker fell, and a footman, in handsome livery, received her without a word, and walked before her into a reception-room, where a waiting-maid, who might easily have been taken for a lady, was sitting, and apparently expecting her.

On Susannah's entrance, the servant-maid hurriedly rose and curtsied in the French fashion.

"I will announce your Highness to her Grace the Duchess." She then said in French, "Will your Highness deign to enter the drawing-room? Your Highness is in her own house."

"I am aware of that," Susannah answered.

She entered a very handsome room, luxuriantly furnished. She sat down in an easy-chair, and the waiting-maid retired backwards with an infinity of bows.

The lovely barmaid received these marks of respect and her new title without manifesting the slightest emotion. She doffed her old rags to put on a fashionable but almost theatrical costume. A black velvet body displayed her magnificent shape, and, instead of a bonnet, her head was covered by a large lace veil, thrown on as if accidentally, whilst through its transparent folds could be seen jet ornaments twisted in the hair.

By day, as by gas-light, she was adorably lovely; but at the present moment fatigue could be traced beneath the proud repose of the lines of her face; it could be seen that agony also, a cruel and lengthened agony, vainly combated, had thrown a cloud of apathy over the native fire of those great black eyes.

By daylight, too, there was less vigour and less innate audacity in the face and demeanour of this marvelous creature. The disdain of the previous evening had assumed the garb of suffering, and it was all the better for her charms. Too much strength in a woman is astonishing and repulsive; and any man who saw her would have experienced a feeling of egotistic happiness at perceiving the loving weakness of the woman behind her haughty perfections.

Her elbow was supported on the sculptured arm of an easy chair, and her head rested on her hand. She did not deign a glance at the splendour of the room, into which she stepped, almost as it were, after leaving a taproom. Her heavy eye fell abruptly on the table before her, which she did not notice. She might have been taken for one of those glorious Circassian girls whom the slavery of the harem stupifies—who become stones, and only retain their material beauty.

But, on looking at her more closely, it could be seen that this hardness only affected the surface. Within this lovely, motionless, cold, and dead body there was a soul which was silent, slumbering, perhaps—but there was a soul.

A door turned softly on its hinges, while the curtain that concealed it slipped along a gilded rod. On the threshold appeared an old woman's face, which almost disappeared in an exuberant cloud of ribbons and lace. On this face, whose aquiline and well-designed features still struggled against the "irreparable insults of years," two quick, piercing, and curious eyes glistened beneath eyelids agitated by nervous quivering.

There was a good deal of craft in these eyes, and a good deal more in the features that accompanied them. There was also a borrowed pleasantness, and a certain winning look, which was not without nobility. The owner of these eyes and the rest was a little, thin, pale woman, wrapped up in a large quilted neglige.

She stopped in the doorway, and fixed her eye on the stranger. The look lasted a long time, and was that of an experienced and sensible woman. When the examination was ended, she indulged in a smile and a satisfied look.

"She'll do!" she muttered; "perfect! Give me a blind man to spy out a pretty woman."

She coughed and closed the door. Susannah turned slowly.

"My dear child," the old woman said, "I am the Dowager Duchess de Gêvres; you are the widow of my unhappy nephew who died in the flower of his age, and whom I shall ever regret, Prince Philip de Longueville. Embrace me, dear niece."

The old Frenchwoman bent over and kissed Susannah on the forehead.

"Princess," she continued, "you must remember, without doubt, your husband's name, whom you have been lamenting for six months. Philip de Longueville, my darling. Philip—de—Longueville. You understand?"

Susannah fixed her large, bold eyes on her new aunt.

"Philip de Longueville," she repeated.

"Fie, Susan—your name is Susan—we will cut off the Hebrew termination: fie, my child! a little more respect than that for the name of the descendants of Dunois the Brave. We are bastards of the blood royal, and a hundred poets have sung the praises of our ancestors more or less poetically."

The little Frenchwoman declaimed this tirade with an emphasis half serious, half comic.

"Princess," she went on as she drew up an easy chair, in which she suddenly collapsed her small person, "you are my niece, I am your aunt, and we must love one another dearly, for the law of nature is positive on that point. You are really the loveliest girl I have seen during the sixty years I have been in the world; but you have heard that many times before. By the way, here is your coat of arms, my dear niece; this seal will be henceforth yours."

She slipped on Susannah's finger a large ring set with brilliants, on which was engraved the escutcheon of France with the bar sinister.

"Now let us talk about business," she continued; "and first be kind enough to read this letter addressed to you."

Susannah opened the letter and read it: the contents were as follows:—

"On leaving the man who saved your life last night, you proceeded to Manvers Square, where you walked for a long time round the ruins of a demolished house."

"My father's abode," Susannah mournfully interrupted.

"You then proceeded to Leadenhall-street. You took a cab at the corner of Cornhill, near the Bank, and drove to Farren's

Hotel, Golden Square, where you passed the night. This morning you went out at daybreak on foot, and bought a dress, which must be changed for something more meet; then you spent two hours at the corner of Regent-street in watching for somebody who did not come."

"Who did not come," Susannah mournfully repeated.

"Still, you were very desirous to see the person,"

The letter went on, which seemed to answer Susannah's remark.

"You left Clifford-street, returned once more, then went away, and yet went back. Nothing is hidden from the eye that henceforth watches your actions. Wait! When the order arrives, be ready; when you have obeyed, be silent!"

There was no signature.

Susannah threw down the letter, and looked the old woman in the face.

"I have been dogged about;" she said; "what's the use? These people call themselves powerful; but what do I care? it is folly to threaten a woman who was met on the road to death."

The piercing eyes of the Dowager Duchess de Gêvres fell before Susannah's glance just as the horns of a snail are drawn in on contact with a foreign substance. She instinctively felt herself subdued, and kept silent long after Susannah's grave and firm voice had ceased to echo in her ear.

"May Heaven forgive me, my child," she at length said in a submissive accent, entirely freed from that tinge of raillery which had pierced through her earlier remarks. "You are going a great deal too far. You have been followed, and I am disposed to believe it; but it was through pure anxiety. These people call themselves powerful; they are so, and to an extent that you cannot suspect. As for threats, fie! I take on myself to assure you that you are mistaken. No threats. You will be used to carry out a plan—several plans—but what do I know? And, in exchange, you will have luxury, pleasure, happiness——"

"Happiness?" the lovely girl murmured, her eye losing its strange rigidity. "Happy when he does not love me!"

"Who can refrain from loving you, my child?"

"One who does not know me."

"All the better. Are you aware of all the fresh attractions you possess since yesterday? Yesterday you were merely beau-

tiful, to-day you are a rich Princess. Listen, and believe me, Susan. You have henceforth within your reach means whose force is almost supernatural. In the same way as the mysterious power of which we spoke just now will employ you, this mysterious power will serve you. You are from to-day one of the thousand atoms composing it. You augment its irresistible power, and that power is yours. What you may desire will be accomplished, what seems to you like a mad dream will become reality."

Susannah had half risen. Her exquisite face gradually lost its expression of gloomy insensibility, her eye sparkled beneath the violently-dilated arch of her black eyebrows, her nostrils expanded, her bosom heaved, a species of magnetic current seemed to pour life into each of her veins.

She was no longer beautiful, but sublime.

The Frenchwoman, dazzled by this sudden transformation, was silent, and gazed at her.

"What I desire will be accomplished," she repeated, with an effort; "what seemed to me like a dream will become reality."

She raised her eyes to Heaven, and tears slowly coursed down her cheeks.

"Oh! what I wish," she went on, clasping her hands with inexpressible passion; "it is my dream; it is his love! Are they powerful enough to give me his love?"

The Frenchwoman began smiling as she drew Susannah's hand towards her.

"They can do everything," she replied, giving her lowered voice a mysterious emphasis; "you have sorrowed bitterly, I think?"

"Indeed, yes," Susannah replied.

"You will forget what tears are. Tell me is the man you love rich and mighty?"

"I rather think he is poor. He often came to borrow of my father at the time when there was gold in our house in Manvers Square, which is now demolished."

"What is his name?"

"Brian Lancaster!" the lovely girl replied, with a movement of pride.

"Brian Lancaster?" the Frenchwoman repeated, with a grin of disdain—"the poor brother of the opulent Earl of Whitemanor? Good Heavens, my daughter, and is it for Mr. Lancaster, that poor younger son, that you have sorrowed so bitterly?"

Susannah sharply withdrew her hands, and her stern glance drove back further sneers rising to the lips of the Duchess Dowager de Gêvres.

"I love him," she said, as she raised her queenly head with that air we know. "I am proud of it."

"You are right, my darling," the old woman replied, in a friendly tone. "I am a Franchwoman, and fond of a joke, so you must never feel angry with me. After all, the Honourable Brian Lancaster may, perhaps, some day inherit Whitemanor and the Peerage. It was he you sought at the corner of Clifford Street?"

Susannah answered by a nod.

"Poor dear child!" the Duchess exclaimed; "but if he had come along, he would not have noticed you, or, if he had, your prospects would have been ruined. Do not open your glorious eyes so widely; ruined, I repeat. Good Heavens! do you imagine that Brian Lancaster, eccentric and mad though he is—I must ask your pardon—would fall in love with a girl he met at a street corner?"

"That is true," Susannah murmured, turning pale, as if she had escaped a danger.

"It is not so you must meet him, Princess, but in some splendid West End ball-room, or in the Park, behind the glass of your escutcheoned carriage."

"That is true, too," Susannah assented. "Luxury and wealth! he made me forget all that. Yesterday I was promised them——"

She rose and, as if her eyes had been suddenly unclosed, looked round the room. What she saw made her smile joyously, and her joy was noble and lovely as her sorrow.

"Very well," she continued; "that man has kept his word with me. All this is nearly as fine as my father's house before he was hanged. Oh! I shall live here as I used to do. I will paint beautiful flowers and give them to you. I will sing, and shall see him. When shall I see him?"

Susannah uttered the first words in a pensive, gentle manner, but she asked the last question in a hurried and impassioned voice. The old lady reflected for a moment, joining her tiny wrinkled hands on her knees, and, half closing her eyes, said—

"You will see him this very night."

"To-night!" Susannah exclaimed, bounding like a startled fawn, and seeming to suffer from a species of delirium; "to-night!"

Then, reassuming her exquisitely graceful and dignified air, she offered her hand to the Frenchwoman, and said with an expression of gratitude,

"Thanks; I shall still love you."

The old woman shook her head slowly.

"My poor child," she said, "you love him dearly, you love him too much; such a love is dangerous, because it will exclude prudence. Could you keep any secret from him?"

"No! I will tell him everything."

"You will ruin yourself, my child."

"What matters?"

"And be his death!"

Susannah frowned defiantly.

"I do not threaten, my child," the Frenchwoman continued. "Your anger is unnecessary, for I only speak the truth. Listen to me. I know, as everybody does, the eccentric and daring character of Brian Lancaster. If you say a word, he will understand the rest, he will try to combat. Now, contending with the League is death. He is alone, while the association is so numerous, that it cannot count its members. He is a younger son, a poor gentleman. Among us there are lords and gentry whose wealth is proverbial. At the first collision he will be broken like glass."

"I shall be silent," Susannah interrupted.

"I believe so; you will be silent, my dear girl," the Dowager went on, fixing a deep and scrutinising glance on her supposed niece. "You must be silent, for you know that there are eyes and ears open around you. You will enjoy the present happiness, and not engage in a mad struggle. You are the Princess de Longueville. What secrets can be asked of you? You will give him your love, and what more can a poor gentleman desire than the love of the widow of a Prince, only twenty, lovely as an angel, and richer than a queen?"

"No, no, that is not enough," Susannah said; "were I really a queen, it would not be enough, for Brian stands above all rank. But I will be silent. You told me that I shall see him to-night."

"I shall keep my word, child."

The Frenchwoman rose and rang. The lady's-maid came in and, by her orders, brought writing materials.

"It is now three o'clock," the Duchess muttered as she wrote a few lines: "We have three hours left, and that is more than I require. Give this note to Joe, Marie, and tell him to carry it straight to the Doctor; give this other to Dick; the Major must

have it within half an hour. Order Ned to have the Princess's carriage ready for half-past six. Go. My dear niece," the old lady continued, "we are going to the play to-night; pray go and get ready."

"But Brian?"

"He will be there."

"How do you know that?"

"He will, my dear."

## CHAPTER IX.

### EDWARDES AND CO.

At the period of which we write there was, a little beyond the angle formed by Finch Lane and Cornhill, a narrow passage running along the side of an enormous square house, whose frontage was in Finch Lane and Cornhill as well. Since then all this has disappeared before the City Improvements.

At that time Finch Lane was muddier and blacker than it is to-day. The passage in question added no little to its bad renown. During the day it was filled with wolves who gained a scanty livelihood in the purlieus of the Stock Exchange; at night could be heard the hoarse curses of drunkards, or the blandishments of abandoned women.

The ground-floor of the great house fronting Cornhill was occupied by two shops. In the windows of one was a magnificent assortment of jewelry, while the other contained all the various effects belonging to the toilette of both sexes—from patent leather boots, open-worked stockings, and puffed sleeves to ready-made cloaks and real Cashmere shawls.

These two shops did a roaring trade. Over that of the jeweler could be read the name of Falkstone, over that of the hosier, Bertram.

In Finch Lane was a money-changer's shop, still under the same roof, but here the aspect was very different. The light was more gloomy here, and this, added to the peculiar arrangement of the dim curtains and French grey wire-work, gave an almost mysterious air to the exchange office. For all that, though, nothing very extraordinary seemed to take place there, for during

the day bank-notes were regularly exchanged for gold, or gold for bank-notes.

Next to the money-changer's was a broker, and here the darkness was more marked. In this house the gas had to be lit twenty minutes sooner than at the exchange office. The name of the money-changer was Waller, that of the broker, Peter Practice.

Lastly, in the rear of the house and in the passage now destroyed, were eight or ten barred windows, behind which the glass was white-washed to prevent any indiscreet passer-by peeping in. This was the office of the establishment of Edwardes and Company.

What trade did this house carry on? No one could have answered exactly; and this mystery greatly troubled the small dealers in Finch Lane and the great dealers in Cornhill. It was certainly said vaguely that Edwardes and Co. dealt in foreign merchandise; but what was their nature? Vans were often seen arriving with bales, and country carts stopped at the door. Bales and parcels were taken in, but none were ever seen to come out again.

This, it must be allowed, was very strange. Mrs. Brown, housekeeper over the way, had spent hours at her top floor window trying to find out what Edwardes and Co. really dealt in, but it was of no use. Why, for instance, were neither clerks nor master ever seen in this extraordinary house? Persons who entered the office under the pretence of asking change for a sovereign, or any other fair, civic, and civil excuse, had seen a grating, and behind it carefully-closed green curtains. That was all.

A porter, in a bright red waistcoat, who stood in the doorway, was the only living being that displayed his face in this singular warehouse. Why, too—and that was enough to excite the curiosity of the surrounding shopkeepers—had the hosier, the jeweler, the money-changer, and the broker all started in business just at the same moment when Edwardes and Co. opened their office in the Lane?

These were grave questions, difficult to answer. Mrs. Brown talked about it all day long with her next-door neighbour, Mrs. Black, and could not get an inch nearer to the solution of the mystery. From time to time—say once a month—at the large windows on the first floor, looking out on Cornhill, a handsome gentleman appeared behind the silken curtains. Who was he? Was he the head of the firm of Edwardes and Co.?

All that was known was, that Messrs. Edwardes, the broker, the money changer, the hosier, and the jeweler, had all been here for a year, did a very good business, apparently, and there was not a whisper against their credit. Once the office-sweepers fancied they had got the clue to the mystery. They saw some thirty strong and poorly-clad men enter the office of Edwardes and Co. It was plain that these men were sailors; they had come in search of a ship; hence Edwardes and Co. were shipping agents.

Excellent reasoning. But, at the end of a month, the same men were seen to return. They did not do so next month, but turned up again on the third. They were not sailors. What were they, then? People went so far as to talk of extraordinary things—"long firms"—criminal deeds—modern mercantile brigands!—nonsense, in a word, which reasonable tradesmen would have been ashamed to repeat.

However this may be, the day after the ball at Trevor House was selected by the supposed sailors to pay another visit to the office of Edwardes and Co. At about eleven in the morning they arrived in detachments, and entered the house by the door opening on the passage. The red-breasted porter recognised them and let them pass. There were thirty-six of them. When the thirty-sixth had passed, the porter locked the outer door and withdrew.

The thirty-six new comers were nearly all powerful and determined fellows. Some displayed on their faces the ignoble marks left by a life of debauchery, others had honourable wounds, the result of recent boxing encounters, while others, again, were good-looking and unmarked. The latter did not look as if they had walked London streets long; but no one would have cared to meet them on a dark night in an open place. They had really the look of bold outlaws; and, apart from their costumes, Robin Hood's comrades must have resembled them.

One or two boys, scarcely emerged from childhood, formed part of the meeting. Most of them have already passed before us, and the reader would have recognised in this honourable assembly a goodly number of our Thames pirates.

Here were, for instance, hearty Tom Turnbull, who, by the light of day, we must say to his credit, had the look of a determined scoundrel, Fat Charley, rower in the Captain's boat, Patrick, Sawney the barker, Snail the miawer, and several others, whose names we have not mentioned. Only the Captain was

absent, with his blue tail-coat and his cane saved from the wreck.

The office in which they were collected was a large room, divided in two by a grating, in which were several small windows, over one of which was painted "Cashier." Our thirty-six scamps were sufficiently good scholars to decipher this magical word. They were sitting silently on a wooden bench running all round the room. The last comer, who found no room on the bench, was standing at a window and flattening his nose against one of the panes. At the first glance, it might be supposed that he was trying to peer through the whitewash; but, on looking at him more closely, it could be seen that a less material task occupied his mind. The forefingers of his right hand rapidly passed from one to the other of the fingers of his left hand; he was evidently counting. This man was a Babbage in rags.

In rags, however, is not exactly the expression. The various fragments of his dress still held together, but not very securely. He had a pea-jacket over a blue striped shirt, black trousers with slits at the ankle, allowing stockings, marvelously darned, to be seen. He wore an old beaver hat with an extraordinary narrow brim, and the heels of his shoes were at least two inches in height.

In spite of the added height imparted by these formidable heels, the man was of very short stature, and his awkwardly set-on limbs made him look still more awkward. On the other hand, each of his limbs, regarded separately, had a vigorous aspect. His long and muscular arms hung far down by his side, and his bandy legs displayed a tremendous calf, while his head was fixed clumsily, though firmly, between shoulders of very decent width.

As for his face, we cannot say that it had a common expression. Under the narrow-brimmed hat was visible a brow not wider than the palm of the hand. From it started, without any transition, an aquiline, thin, pale nose, whose narrow nostrils found a difficulty in absorbing the necessary amount of air. He had no beard, but only here and there a few tufts of reddish hair pierced through his rugged skin. His mouth was small and retiring, and on either side of it an habitual smile had hollowed two rather pleasing wrinkles. His glance was piercing, at times cunning, at others bold, under his thick red eyebrows.

Before mentioning his name, which the reader knows, we will add one last original feature: he had pockets everywhere—in his trousers, jacket, waistcoat, and even in his shirt. His jacket

alone comprised five, and the principal one, made at a place where fashion rarely expects such a thing, ran from his waist to his knees in front, and was lined with leather. The others, deep and conscientiously sewn, were hidden as well as they could be.

This man was Bob Lantern, our assassin of Westminster Abbey memory.

Bob's thirty-five comrades had been assembled for some minutes, when a voice was heard behind the green curtain calling:

"Are you all there?"

"All, Mr. Smith," Tom Turnbull answered, who seemed to exercise a certain amount of authority over the rest.

"All here!" little Snail repeated in a falsetto.

At this moment the grating of a key being turned in a lock was audible behind the curtain.

"What a careless fellow I am," the invisible Mr Smith went on; "I forgot to get change. Nicholas."

The porter at once. by an inner door, entered Mr. Smith's office. The latter placed a bundle of bank notes in his hand.

"Change," he said; "at once."

Nicholas went out.

"Did you hear that, lads?" Turnbull asked in an undertone; "change."

He got up and clambered on to the bench to peep over the wirework.

"What are you up to there?" Charley asked.

"Yes, what are you doing there, Tommy?" Snail's shrill voice added.

Tom glided down among his comrades and placed a finger on his lip.

"Stash that," he whispered.

"Stash it," Snail repeated, with numerous gestures to enforce silence.

Charley pulled his ear.

"I shall certainly smash you some day, you little abortion," he growled. "Well, Tommy, what have you got to say?"

Snail miawed plaintively, while the whole band collected round Turnbull.

"Two yards from us," he said, in a hoarse whisper, "there is an iron safe—open."

"Well?"

"In that safe there is no silver."

"What a pity!"

"No gold."

"Oh, dash it!"

"Silence, in the devil's name," Tom Turnbull exclaimed; "I'll smash the first chatterer."

Snail prudently retired to the rear rank.

"No gold," Turnbull repeated; "but do you know why silver and gold there is none?"

"No, Tom; you might tell us."

"Because there is no room for it. The safe is chock-a-block o' bank notes."

All eyes flashed, and a hoarse murmur arose.

"Two skips from us," Tom went on, "there is enough money to make all our fortunes!"

The murmur heightened. A passionate greed was depicted on all the faces. All eyes were fixed on the wire screen.

"Patience, my friends, patience," said Mr. Smith, who regarded this merely as an ebullition of annoyance at having to wait.

Mr. Smith was sitting at his table and quietly reading "A day in the Country with Professor Comfort's School," in the *Times*. It is impossible to draw his picture for you. He might be a very good-looking man, but large green spectacles, and a shade of extraordinary dimensions, too almost entirely concealed his face.

"Make our fortunes!" little Snail muttered. "I am 'on.'"

"Dear boys," said a voice which had not yet been heard, "you must mind your eye."

"Bob Lantern!" all exclaimed. "Where do you come from?"

Bob had quietly left his position at the window to join the group that now surrounded Turnbull. All turned towards him. He waved his hand to command silence, winked, and said in a whisper:

"I never make more row than is needed, my lads. I have been in the gang as long as you have. By the way, I went to hunt you up this morning by order of his Honour; but if I had known this was your little game——"

"Silence, you humbug," Turnbull growled. "You will be the first to help us. I tell you there are piles upon piles of bank notes."

"It's very tempting," Bob replied, running out his tongue over his lips. "If we could nick 'em on the strict *q t*, I would not say no. The Captain wont drop in on us, I suppose?"

"No," Charley answered.

"It's cursed tempting," Bob repeated thoughtfully.

He slipped up to the grating, which he cautiously tried.

"Patience, my friends, patience," said Mr. Smith, who was still reading his paper.

"It's strong," Bob muttered; "precious well set."

"Strong!" Turnbull repeated, with a snarl; "are you men, or mice?"

"Men," little Snail answered.

"What are we to do?" the others asked.

Tom made no reply, but leaped forward, and gave the woodwork that sustained the grating a tremendous kick.

"What's that?" Mr. Smith asked angrily.

Tom was about to repeat the kick, but Lantern checked him.

"You make too much row, my boy; you must always manage so as to give only one blow."

And without taking a run, or apparently making any great effort, he gave the lock so violent a kick with his iron-shod heel, that it flew to pieces. This done, he stepped aside, leaving the mob room to rush into the private office.

"I only gave one kick, you see," he muttered, with satisfaction; "but it was a one-er."

When the thirty-five assailants rushed in, Mr. Smith, warned by Turnbull's first attack, was trying to place himself in a defensive posture. He had dragged his table between the door and the safe, and was now trying to close the latter; but, in his trouble, could not succeed. The skirt of his coat had caught, and rendered all his efforts vain.

"Don't take so much trouble, Mr. Smith," Turnbull said roughly; "the business is done, and, if you are quiet, we will let you go snacks."

"Scoundrels!" Mr. Smith shouted, displaying a face pale as death under his shade; "before you reach that safe, you must murder me!"

"Why not?" answered Turnbull coolly.

An immense burst of laughter greeted this reply.

"That may happen," added little Snail; "hang me if it mayn't."

Bob Lantern thrust his head through the door, and looked to the very bottom of the enclosure.

"It is a sweet job," he muttered; "but I have known such jobs turn out very badly."

The interior of the private office was furnished like most places

of the sort. To the right was a door opening into the immense warehouses of Edwardes and Co., while on the left a winding staircase led to the first floor.

The assailants did not take the trouble to notice this, for they had something else to do. While Tom, Charley, and others slipped round the table which Mr. Smith had placed as a rampart before the safe, another, more active or more eager, leaped on to the table, shouting—

"The first share for me."

"Go it, Sawney!" the mob exclaimed.

"You shall have it," Mr. Smith suddenly said, as he drew a brace of pistols from his breast.

He fired. Sawney fell back, his brains scattering over the assailants, who recoiled.

"Oh! that is the game," Bob Lantern said, as he retreated to the door of the farther room.

But the others did not imitate his example. Turnbull and Charley, rushing forward at the same moment, hurled down Mr. Smith, and Turnbull groped for his knife to cut his victim's throat.

At this moment a strange thing occurred. All the assailants, with the exception of Turnbull and Charley, were suddenly seized by a panic, and retired promptly beyond the grating, leaving Sawney's corpse lying on the table. All concealed themselves as well as they could, with hanging heads and the look of children surprised in a fault by a stern schoolmaster.

What caused the terror was this pistol report, deadened in the street, but which had made a great echo inside the house. A man in a black mask showed himself at the top of the winding staircase, and looked down. Without saying a word, he slowly descended the stairs one by one. All had seen him except Tom and Charley, who were more seriously engaged. The masked man, addressing the cashier, said:

"What is the meaning of this disturbance, Mr. Smith? I wish to be quiet."

Turnbull and Charley let go on hearing this voice, and raised their heads. They fell back several paces, and trembled violently.

"His Honour!" Tom said.

Charley assumed a suppliant posture.

"They are fairly taken in," Lantern muttered in his corner; "I always thought that mysterious staircase led somewhere."

"His Honour" slowly returned the way he had come, while Charley and Tom went back piteously to their comrades. Mr. Smith got up and restored his table to its place.

"I wish one of you would put this out of my way," he said coolly, as he pointed to Sawney's corpse.

"I will, Mr. Smith," Turnbull answered respectfully.

As if nothing had happened, Mr. Smith took up the *Times*, and resumed his reading at the spot where he had been interrupted while waiting for Nicholas to bring the change.

## CHAPTER X.

### TWO SIDES OF THE STREET

THE thirty-five individuals who had just laid siege to the strong box of Edwardes and Co. remained for a minute or two under the impression of the apparition which had put an end to the fight. This impression was, doubtless, very profound, for they did not dare to breathe a syllable, and the most turbulent were now the most afraid. Turnbull hid himself behind Charley, who n vain tried to shelter his stoutness behind lean Snail. No one could hide himself behind Bob Lantern, for that worthy man had, so to speak, embedded himself in the wall.

Outside, a few tradespeople fancied they had heard something like a pistol shot. Mrs. Black went to Mrs. Brown, who conducted her to Mrs. Grubb, who joined them in paying a visit to Mrs. Bloomsbury. In the latter's back parlour, Mrs. Dodd called Mrs. Bull to witness that the nameless passage was inhabited by Old Harry, under the false name of Edwardes and Co., and Mrs. Foot and Mrs. Crossgrain affirmed that the thing was not absolutely impossible. The ladies' conversation went on for some time, and all doubts were drowned in gallons of tea.

At the end of three minutes, Snail, who did not like remaining at one spot, made a move. Charley drew himself up, and Turnbull coughed discreetly. The ice was broken.

"Poor Sawney!" Tom muttered.

"Poor Sawney!" Snail repeated, with a pretence of weeping; "he barked better than a dawg."

Little Snail was a curious miniature robber. He appeared to be thirteen years of age at the most, but his pale, yellow, wrinkled face already resembled that of an old man. His features had a double expression; at one moment they displayed the most utter

brutishness, at the next they were illumined by a truly diabolical glance of malice. He was not as tall as boys usually are at eleven, for his thin limbs, without muscle and of the same thickness throughout, did not at all announce the approach of manhood. Like all boys, good or bad, he liked to raise himself to the importance of a man, and had already done many villainous acts to obtain honourable consideration among the band.

"Why didn't Mr. Smith give us 'the office' that the gaffer was up there?" Charley grumbled, darting at the cashier a malevolent look. "We'd have kept quiet then, you lay."

"We might have done the trick," Bob Lantern whispered, "if we had not made such a 'chi-ike.' As for his Honour, it would take a clever man to say where he is and where he isn't, offhand."

"Do you know him, Bob?" Turnbull asked, with ardent curiosity.

"I? My lads, life is too expensive, and I only 'tend to my little fakes. Still, it must be allowed that old Smith settled Sawney very straight and clean."

"Poor Sawney!" several voices repeated.

Bob left his corner, and walked up to the corpse, which he felt like an anatomist.

"He was a strong fellow," he went on; "he will make a decent subject, and we can sell him to some swell student for a sov. Who'll help me to cart him away?"

"No one will stir," Turnbull exclaimed; "that body is mine."

"Why so, Tom?"

"Because," Turnbull replied, as he wiped away a tear, "Sawney was my friend. The best I can do is to make some'at by his poor body."

This sentimental argument was admitted by every one, and Sawney's body was decreed to Turnbull, his best friend, that he might sell it for a pound. Bob retired from the corpse with a grin of vexation.

At this moment Nicholas the porter entered the office, little suspecting the misfortunes that his delay had all but produced. At the sight of Sawney's body and the broken wire-screen he displayed no surprise, which may lead to the belief that strange matters happened now and then in the office of Edwardes and Co. He handed Mr. Smith a heavy bag; this the latter emptied out on his table, which was soon covered with gold.

Mr. Smith made thirty-six small piles of four sovereigns each. Then he took from a drawer a list on which names were written,

and called them over. Each time that he uttered a name a man advanced and received his money. When "Sawney" was called, Turnbull and Lantern presented themselves simultaneously.

"I was his best friend," Turnbull said emphatically.

"You have his body already," Bob retorted, as he thrust forth a hand to clutch the money.

Turnbull clenched his huge fists.

"Don't touch it," he said, "or I'll hurt you."

Bob thrust his hand under his shirt and felt for the handle of a knife, which he always carried. At the same time his bandy legs stiffened under him, and his eyes flashed fire. Turnbull grew pale, and fancied he could already feel the cold blade between his ribs. But Bob Lantern all at once turned quiet and went back to his corner. He had seen Mr. Smith pick up the coins and place them with the other overplus in a drawer. Turnbull saw it too, and his first movement was to rush on Mr. Smith, but he did not do it.

"If it wasn't for fear of his Honour, who is the devil, or something worse," he growled as he checked his furious passion; "I would drive your green spectacles into your skull, you old villain."

Mr. Smith may have heard him, but gave no token of having done so.

"Now," he said, pointing to the dead body, "remove that, and behave yourselves better another time."

"I shall want a sack, Mr. Smith," Turnbull replied, "and some straw to pack up my poor old matey."

Mr. Smith rang for Nicholas, who brought a sack and some straw. In a twinkling Sawney's body, cunningly packed up, bore a striking likeness to a bale of goods. In this state Turnbull put it on his powerful shoulders. The only persons left in the office were Mr. Smith, Nicholas, and Bob Lantern.

"Why are you lingering here?" Mr. Smith asked the latter.

"I am waiting," Bob answered. "His Honour will be glad to see me."

"You?"

Bob looked round the room impertinently.

"There is no one but me here, Mr. Smith," he replied.

"And what does his Honour want with you?"

"Can't say," my excellent Mr. Smith; "perhaps to ask after the health of my family. One thing is certain, he is waiting for me."

"Nicholas," Mr. Smith said, "go and ask his Honour if he wishes to see this scoundrel."

"No, no," Bob interrupted; "I like to go about things in a straightforward way. You'll ask the gov. if he wishes to say a word to poor Bob Lantern."

An instant later Bob mounted the winding stair that led to the first-floor, and placed his heavy muddy heels on the carpet of a handsome room. He crossed this room, preceded by Nicholas, and through three others sumptuously furnished, in which he took occasion to thrust half a dozen articles of trifling value into the vast abysses of his leathern pocket.

"They will do for Tempey," he thought, each time that he appropriated anything.

The last room he entered was a species of grand drawing-room, looking out on Cornhill. Near one of the windows, whose thick curtains had been drawn back to let the pale sunbeams of a December morning pass, our handsome dreamer of Westminster Abbey, half reclining on a velvet sofa, was smoking an Oriental pipe with a long amber mouthpiece. He was pale and wearied, and his posture revealed that lassitude which is the result of a sleepless night. In front of him a little negro, a living desk, supported an open book, at whose pages Mr. Edwardes every now and then gave a vacant glance.

At his side, in an easy chair, lay a black mask and a short revolver with four barrels. We have seen the mask. As for the pistol, had the assailants tried to resist when his Honour descended the winding stair, we should, in all probability, have seen it flash too. At the sound of Lantern's footsteps, Mr. Edwardes instinctively took up the mask and covered his face rapidly; but he as suddenly laid it by his side again. Bob advanced with his body bent double, bowing awkwardly at each step, and seemingly afraid of putting his foot down on the carpet. Mr. Edwardes gave a nod, which dismissed the little negro.

"What do you want?" he asked Bob.

The latter called up a crafty smile to his thin lips.

"I have come, with your Honour's leave, to wish you good morning, as well as for the little matter your Honour knows about."

Bob winked as he uttered the last words.

"I know nothing," Mr. Edwardes answered. "Make haste and explain yourself clearly."

"I will try to do so, your Honour; but, laws! you aint a'ready forgot Westminster and the young lady—an awful pooty gal, on my soul and conscience?"

Mr. Edwardes had forgotten, or, at least, his thoughts were elsewhere, but these few words sufficed to recall the scene of the

previous evening. The sensations he experienced in the Abbey were, while gentle, so vivid, that he laid his hand over his eyes to preserve their fugitive images to his thoughts.

"Yes," he continued, after a moment or two of silence; "she was a lovely girl! What a holy fervour there was in her attitude! what innocence in her look! what modesty in her voice! and yet what love gleamed through it all!"

"The fact is," Bob Lantern asserted, "she is an uncommon pretty young party."

Edwardes let his hand fall, and looked at Lantern.

"I gave you a commission," he said.

"You did, and that is why I asked to see your Honour perticler. I followed the young woman—or young women, for there are two of them, and a sort of hobble-de-hoy, who makes three. By the way, he asked me what your name was."

"Who did?"

"Why, the gawk. He guv me a 'shiner' for my trouble."

"And you told him?"

"Nothin' at all, your Honour. It was good pay for that, wasn't it?"

"And where does the young lady live?"

"Well, your Honour, you wont need to take no keb to pay her a wisit, and I said to myself straight, 'It seems as if it was express.'"

"Where does she live?" Edwardes repeated impatiently.

Bob Lantern grew serious.

"In hands reach; opposite to you, on the other side of the street."

Edwardes, by an instinctive movement, rapidly turned his head and looked at the windows of the second floor opposite to which Bob pointed. His action was so rapid, that a lovely maiden face, half hidden behind a curiously-raised curtain, had not time to conceal itself thoroughly. Edwardes gave a glance in which there were three or four declarations of love at least. The girl turned crimson, her eyes closed, and the curtain fell.

"It is she," Edwardes said; "I could only see her hair, but it is she, I am sure. How do you know that she lives there on that floor?"

"I will tell you," Bob replied; "I cannot knock at doors on account of my livery, which does not create confidence. When the two girls and the gent went in there, I remained in the street. All at once a thought struck me; I looked up; all the windows were unlighted except those of the second floor, where the gas was started a few minutes after."

Mr. Edwardes evidently found the reasoning satisfactory, for he gave an affirmative nod.

"That will do," he said; "tell Mr. Smith to pay you."

"I should prefer, if you have no objection," Bob said with embarrassment, "receiving it from your Honour's hand."

"Why so?"

"Living is so dear——"

"Well?"

"And Mr. Smith will tell me that I have had my whack already."

Mr. Edwardes threw him two sovereigns and dismissed him with a wave of the hand. Bob kissed the coins as costers and beggars do, for luck, and said—

"Bless your Honour."

But as he withdrew he muttered—

"Forty 'bob,' when he gives a 'tenner' to the begging-bag. This is not fair. Perhaps Sawney will be more generous than that. I am preciously inclined to try him."

Mr. Edwardes remained on the sofa, but still gazed on the window, now modestly veiled by a curtain. Gradually he fell into deep thought, and was so absorbed by it, that he did not notice the curtain raised again and Clara's lovely face re-appear. The maiden fixed on him one of those long and piercing glances which Mr. MacNab had found so strange the previous evening in the Abbey. Her eyes devoured Edwardes's handsome face, and she seemed unable to remove them. Clara was still paler than on the past night; there were traces of tears under her swollen eyelids, and her cheeks revealed a long, sleepless winter's night. As she gazed on Edwardes, however, her face gradually became brighter; her sorrow gave way to melancholy, and that again to happiness.

Clara was very lovely. Her chaste but impassioned soul shone through the fire of her glances. Her bosom heaved violently, and her breath fell, dry and burning, on the glass whose transparency it scarce obscured; her lips burned and quivered as she murmured strange words in which her will had no share.

Clara loved the stranger with all the passionate ardour of a maiden who had never yet known what the feeling was.

Clara and her younger sister Anna had spent their childhood at Lochmaben. At the age when every young girl most needs the caresses and teaching of a mother, Clara and Anna had lost theirs. Mr. Macfarlane kept them with him for two or three years, and then his conduct suddenly changed, and was surrounded by an unusual mystery. Strangers were admitted to his

house, he had long and frequent conferences with them, and he undertook secret journeys, whose object no one ever knew.

It was then that he requested his sister, Mrs. MacNab, whom family relations kept in London, to take charge of his daughters. Clara, when she thought of this occurrence, could not get rid of the notion that their father wished to free himself from their childish watchfulness, and that he had hidden reasons for keeping them away.

When this proposal was made to MacNab's mother, she had been a widow but a short time, and remained still crushed by the terrible catastrophe which deprived her of her husband, who was murdered. She greeted her nieces gently, but not eagerly; still, in proportion as her grief became chastened, she the more appreciated the charming nature of her charges. Clara and Anna were not alike, but were both equally amiable and good. Mrs. MacNab felt a mother's tenderness for them.

Each time Mr. Macfarlane came to London, and it must be allowed that his visits were not frequent, the excellent lady trembled lest he might have a desire to take his daughters with him. She had no occasion to fear this, for her brother did not dream of such a thing. The little time he remained was spent in "business"—an admirable word, especially invented to foil curiosity. At each new visit, Clara and Anna remarked the rapid change that was taking place in their parent. He was becoming prematurely old, and, at the age of fifty, his pale and wrinkled brow was perfectly bald. The two poor girls would have liked to offer some consolation for this hidden grief, whose effects were so palpable, but Mr. Macfarlane disliked questioning. Clara and Anna, sharply repulsed, could only pity their father in silence.

MacNab, like his mother, dearly loved his cousins. The death of his father, of which he had accidentally been a witness, at first violently shook his youthful faculties, but he was only a boy at the time, and years restored his intellect. Still, the recollection of his father and of his murderer were graven in blood on his memory. The assassin, whom he only saw for a moment, through the fall of the mask that covered his face, did not rise before him very distinctly; but one fact remained luminous and precise on his mind. He was a tall, powerful, and active man, and when the fall of his mask revealed his features, he struck the fatal blow. In doing so his black eyebrows were contracted, and the line of a long scar stood out in white on his reddened forehead. Stephen ever saw this, awake or asleep; he saw it, and trembled with an ardent desire for vengeance.

During his stay at Oxford the North Briton had formed a sincere friendship with one of his fellow-students. They loved each other the more, perhaps, because all was so different in them, for one belonged to the middle class, the other to the nobility. The latter, haughty, energetic, romantic, offered a striking contrast to the young physician, whose character was not without firmness, whose heart possessed that bravery common to every gentleman, but who never carried matters to extremes, and could have no claim to the title of hero. MacNab's friend was Frank Percival.

The past week had been a great one for the Scotchman, for he had made a choice between his two cousins, whom he had hitherto believed he loved with equal affection. His love, which, for want of obstacles, had remained in a latent state, had revealed itself with a sort of violence. He had become very pensive since the scene in the Abbey; he had sighed one whole night like a bellows; and then, he was jealous into the bargain.

Hence he was sad at heart. He had received an invitation to Lord Trevor's ball, and that was surely an attractive thing to a man of his age, especially when that ball was to give him access to a new and unknown world. Such was the case with our physician. Born on the Scottish border, in the county of Dumfries, where Lord Trevor possessed magnificent estates, MacNab had lately called on his lordship, who had known his father intimately, and received him like the son of a friend, promising to become a patient of his. This, while greatly flattering the Northerner, gave him entrance to Trevor House, and he received an invitation which greatly perplexed him for a week. Still, when the hour arrived for him to put on his dress coat and white tie, MacNab remained petulantly in his easy chair, opposite the half-extinguished fire. At ten o'clock his mother tapped at his door.

"Well, my boy," she said, "are you not going?"

"I would have given six months of my life for each of her glances," MacNab replied warmly.

This answer gives us the key to his thoughts. He was dreaming of Clara and that detestable stranger in the Abbey—so handsome, so rich, so disdainful.

"Don't you intend going to the ball?" the old lady again asked.

"For what good!" he exclaimed. "What shall I do among the haughty aristocracy, who will either laugh at me, or not look at me at all. I detest the nobility, mother."

And he added to himself, "I am sure that vain giver of bank-notes is at the least an earl."

"Ah! Stephen," Mrs MacNab said reproachfully, "you forget that your poor father had the esteem of all the gentry of our county; their esteem and love," she added, with a slight outburst of pride. "Our family is not noble, but it is worth more than the London citizens, for the ancient clan of MacNabs——"

"Oh, what do I care for that, mother?" he interrupted impatiently.

Mrs. MacNab looked at him in amazement.

"How you talk to me this evening, my dear," she said; "you must have something on your mind. As for the ball, you can do as you please. I did not come to speak to you about that only. Here is a letter, but you will find no pleasure in reading it, though I think it comes from a real nobleman."

"From Frank!" Stephen shouted joyfully. His face grew brighter.

"I have learned to recognise his handwriting, my boy, because his letters cause you pleasure."

Stephen kissed his mother with an air that asked forgiveness for his ill-humour.

"He arrives to-day!" he said, after reading the first lines; "he must have arrived! Poor Frank; he, too, will be very unhappy."

"He too," Mrs. MacNab repeated. "What! Are you unhappy, Stephen?"

The latter forced a smile, and the good mother, reassured, left her son. She had scarce left the room, when two light taps were heard at the door, and a girlish voice breathed through the key-hole the timidly-uttered words—

"Thank you, cousin Stephen!"

Then a light step could be heard bounding up the stairs. For the last week Anna had been employing all her eloquence to keep Stephen from going to the ball at Trevor House, for she, too, had her simple jealousy. She vaguely understood with what irresistible seductions a woman of fashion must be surrounded; her feminine instinct guessed the intoxication that seizes on a young man in these warm rooms—where smiles cross each other in the perfumed atmosphere, where glances question and reply to one another—and the poor girl felt terribly alarmed, for she loved Stephen with all her heart. The latter had suddenly started up and turned to the door.

"It's Anna's voice," he murmured; "it is Anna's footstep. Poor dear girl. Ah, Clara will not come. What does she care whether I go to the ball or not?"

He buried his head in his hands.

"How lovely she was," he continued, "and how proud that glance rendered me! Oh, I love her! I have loved her ever since I feared that my love was not returned. But who is this man?" he added, with sudden violence. "Where can she have formed his acquaintance? Was it really he she was looking at? And if it be this man, who never crossed my mother's threshold, what can I believe?"

MacNab was stunned by the thought that crossed his mind His character was one of those which easily form suspicions, and do not readily surrender that suspicion when once formed.

"I am mad," he continued after a few minutes; "she is as pure as the angels, whose beauty she possesses. Ah! I am suffering fearfully. I must see poor Frank. We will complain together if we cannot offer each other consolation."

It was more than a year since Stephen had seen Percival, and the last time they met they had only a frivolous conversation. At that time they were both happy and both careless. Recently the Scot had accidentally heard a portion of the rumours spread about Miss Trevor, and it was to this he alluded in his conversation with his mother. Percival and himself would henceforth be in the situation which renders friendship doubly precious, and makes mutual confession an imperious necessity. Hence MacNab impatiently awaited the morrow, and the joy he felt at the thought of seeing the Englishman again stifled slightly the voice of suffering.

He did not go to the Trevor House ball. The next morning he rose, still suffering, but calmer. MacNab had passed through his first night of Love's martyrdom, and promised to quickly remove all uncertainty by asking an explanation of Clara. This is what is called going straight to the point; and if all lovers took the same logical view, no romance would extend beyond its first volume, and that would be a public calamity.

At breakfast Clara was distraught, and apparently absorbed in tyrannical thoughts. The Scotchman did not fail to notice it, but he restrained himself, and resolved to await Percival's opinion before dealing the decisive blow. Anna, on the contrary, was joyous, and most affectionate to her consin, who took no notice of it. The poor child was firmly convinced that MacNab had deprived himself of the pleasure of the ball through love of her, and she could not conceal her delight.

Immediately after breakfast, Clara fled from the room. We know where she proceeded: it was to the curtain behind which she looked into the first floor of the house facing Cornhill. Clara went there daily, but often lost her time, for Edwardes's appear-

ances at the office were few and far between. But she never grew tired of going to her post.

This day she found what she sought. We will not attempt to depict the manifold impressions that succeeded each other in the maiden's mind while sunk in contemplation.

"Clara!" Mrs. MacNab called from the passage. Clara did not stir, for Edwardes was now looking at her.

"Clara!" MacNab shouted, in his turn.

Clara did not hear. She was losing her senses; her heart flew to the stranger, and two burning tears slowly coursed down her cheeks.

"He loves me!" she murmured.

At this moment the door was flung open, and Mrs. MacNab and her son entered together.

"What are you doing there?" the former asked gently. "I have been calling you for the last five minutes."

"You must have something very interesting," MacNab said sternly, "that it should prevent you hearing my voice or my mother's."

The girl stammered, and found it impossible to answer, and the Scot, whose head was still full of jealous suspicion, ran to the window and prepared to draw back the curtain. Clara tried to prevent him by a suppliant gesture, but he paid no attention to this silent prayer. The rings rattled on the pole, and Clara, Mrs. MacNab, and her son looked out together.

There was no one at the windows of the first floor, all of which were hidden by thick curtains. Clara drew a deep breath, and MacNab swallowed a savage remark. As for his mother, it required much worse than this to trouble her eternal quietude.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE CENTRE OF A SPIDER'S WEB

EDWARDES had left his seat at the moment when Clara concealed herself again behind the curtain. He rose with the air of a man beginning to grow tired of this amusement, and rang a bell. The little negro at once appeared.

"Go and strike the gong in the middle room," he said.

"How many 'trokes, mas'er?"

"Four."

The little negro went out by a different door from that through which Bob Lantern passed. A few seconds later, four hollow ringings were heard in the direction taken by the negro. Mr. Edwardes left the drawing-room and proceeded to a room of a circular form, which apparently occupied the exact centre of the house. It had no windows, but was lighted in broad daylight by a chandelier. On the other hand, there were six doors, of which five opened immediately on to winding staircases. Four chairs and an easy-chair were arranged round a vast stove, which thoroughly warmed the room, and Edwardes threw himself negligently into the easy chair.

Almost at the same moment the five doors opened. The two first, looking towards Cornhill, gave admittance to a very richly-dressed lady and a gentleman of fashionable appearance. The third, looking towards Finch Lane, served as entrance for a respectable person, like a well-to-do tradesman. Through the fourth came a little, yellow, thin man, whose threadbare coat was worn through by the angular contact with his pointed joints. Lastly, through the fifth door, entered Mr. Smith, still wearing his green spectacles and shade.

The fine lady came from the fashionable apparel shop in Corn-

hill, where she was sovereign and mistress, under the name of Mrs. Bertram. The gentleman was Mr. Falkstone, her neighbour, the jeweler. The respectable-looking man was Mr. Waller, the money-changer of Finch Lane, while the fourth was no less a person than Peter Practice, a broker's attorney, who was lord and master of the broker's office.

Of these five persons only Mrs. Bertram and Peter Practice showed their faces as nature had made them. It was all the worse for the old lawyer, who had the appearance of a crafty usurer; but all the better for Mrs. Bertram, who was still pretty, though she had long passed the limits of extreme youth.

The other three wore that sort of mask permitted by our civilisation. Thus, Mr. Smith had his shade; Mr. Waller, the money-changer, shared with him the advantage of green spectacles, to which he added a black wig, which formed a slight contrast with the whitish down of his cheek in those places over which the razor does not travel. Mr. Falkstone, the dashing jeweler, had, on the contrary, a light moustache and hair of the same colour, admirably dressed, though his shaven cheek was dark blue.

After all, it might be perfectly innocent. Mr. Smith's sight was, perhaps, weak: Mr. Waller, doubtless, admired dark hair; and as for Mr. Falkstone, we may say that all the hair-dressers of London would be bankrupt if young commercial "swells" were prevented "aureolining" their hair and moustachios.

The new comers advanced slowly to Mr. Edwardes and bowed respectfully. He touched Mrs. Bertram's hand, and gave the others a protecting nod. Mrs. Bertram sat down, but the four men remained standing until, with a regal gesture, Edwardes gave them permission to be seated.

Ah! If Mrs. Black, Mrs. Brown, or Mrs. Grubb had but been permitted to peep through a keyhole, what stories they would have to tell Mrs. Foote. How jealous they would have made Mrs. Crossgrain and Mrs. Bloomsbury!

Silence prevailed for a few minutes in this singular and mysterious congress. Mr. Edwardes had thrown himself back in his chair, and seemed to have forgotten the presence of his partners. The latter were silent and waited. At length Edwardes drew out a watch lavishly encrusted with diamonds.

"Half-past twelve," he muttered. "Am I right, Falkstone?"

"That is the exact time, sir, by Paul's."

Peter Practice drew out a large, plump silver watch, which he compared with Mr. Edwardes's.

"If that is the case," the latter said, "I have not much time to

spare; so let us come to business at once. I want ten thousand pounds cash."

"Ten thousand pounds," Peter repeated, convulsively squeezing the case of his watch.

"Ten thousand pounds," the money-changer, the jeweler, Mr. Smith, and Mrs. Bertram repeated in chorus.

"This evening," Mr. Edwardes added, coldly.

All the heads were bowed simultaneously.

"Mr. Waller," Edwardes continued, "can you give it me at once?"

"I can, sir; but——"

"But what?"

"In the peculiar money."

"I will not have that. And you, Falkstone?"

"Business is frightfully bad, sir——"

"And you, Fanny?" Edwardes interrupted him, impatiently addressing Mrs. Bertram.

"My cash-box is at your disposal," the pretty woman said; "but it does not contain anything like that sum."

"I will take what there is, Fanny. You are always an obliging girl. And you, Master Peter?"

"I will say to your Honour," the ex-attorney remarked; "I will say, clearly and without hesitation, the same as my worthy neighbour, Mr. Falkstone, said, that business is slow, deplorably slow. I may add that it does not move at all."

"And the conclusion, Mr. Practice?"

The ex-lawyer opened his mouth thrice before uttering the following answer:

"My cash-box, such as it is—and Heaven knows it is not very full—is at your Honour's disposal."

Mr. Edwardes reflected for a moment.

"As for you, Smith," he then said, "I know what you have. Confound me, gentlemen, you are going to sleep. Whenever I ask you for a trifle——"

"Ten thousand pounds!" Peter Practice sighed.

"You utter interminable groans. This is intolerable. Are you allowed to run short of goods? Have you not a fair share? Do the police trouble you? Has not all the West End learned the road to your confounded City shops? And to whom do you owe all this, if you please? Goods, security, fashion; I give you them all, and yet you seem to hesitate before satisfying me."

"Heaven forbid!" said Falkstone.

"You know very well, sir, that I am yours devotedly," Mrs. Bertram muttered.

"I believe you are, Fanny, and I thank you. But these gentlemen——"

"We are ready," Falkstone interrupted.

"I am ready," Peter Practice remarked, though he added between his teeth: "but I protest that I am only acting under constraint."

"Very good," Edwardes continued, as he rose. "I count upon you for this evening. You can count on me too, and fear nothing. Good-bye, Fanny.

Mrs. Bertram retired by the door leading to her shop.

"Have you anything to say to me, Falkstone?" Edwardes asked.

"Your affair of to-night?" the jeweler remarked with a smile.

"As usual, Falkstone, as usual—it will not trouble us for long,"

"All the better. To whom shall I hand my share of the money?"

"As before, to Mrs. Bertram."

Falkstone bowed and went out.

"Bad news, sir," the money-changer said, so soon as he was alone with Edwardes and Smith; "three of my bank notes were refused to-day, and alarming rumours are beginning to spread about the City."

"What is said?"

"Nothing precisely; but everyone is getting suspicious, and nobody takes a paltry ten pound note without turning it over and over a dozen times, and then sending it out to a neighbour."

"Do not be alarmed, my good Waller," Edwardes said, with a smile; "before long I shall give you bank-notes no one dare refuse. You can go."

The money-changer crossed the room with regular strides, and disappeared by the door leading to his shop. Smith walked gently round the apartment and opened all the doors, te see that no indiscreet listener remained. That done, he returned to the principal.

"Friend Smith," the latter said, "you must be prudent in future, and not play with pistols, even in the last extremity. It is a talkative weapon, and we are no longer here in our earthly paradise of Teviotdale. But enough on that subject. I saw that you were driven into a corner. I hope that our own men have not begun to refuse our bank notes."

"That depends," Mr. Smith answered. Our tradespeople take

anything unsuspectingly, but your body-guard will only accept gold—they are unmanageable rogues."

"I prefer them like that. Tell me, though, about the affair in Princes Street."

"I went there this morning. Paddy is urging on his giant as much as he can. He stuffs him with beef, saturates him with gin, and the giant does more work than ten strong men could do; but he is wearing himself out."

"It takes a long time," Edwardes said, with a sigh of vexation.

"Princes Street is forty feet wide," Smith answered, "and our elephant is at work at a depth of twenty feet. Within a week the giant will burst like a bladder; but the passage will be finished."

"May Heaven grant it; then, my good Smith, your duties as cashier will be real ones."

Mr. Edwardes thrust back his chair, and drew on a pair of perfumed gloves.

"Good-bye," he said, "and mind that old Peter pays up to-night. Whenever he is asked for a thousand pounds, or anything like it, his heart breaks."

Mr. Edwardes took the staircase leading to the jeweler's, and remained in the shop for a few moments, as if making a purchase; then, going out of the front door, he stepped into a magnificent carriage, drawn by horses whose equal could not, perhaps, be found in all London, unless in the unrivalled stables of Rio Santo.

He had scarce sat down on the cushions, when the carriage started off at full speed for the West End.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE ACTS AND DEEDS OF BOB LANTERN

On leaving the house of Edwardes and Co., Bob Lantern worked his legs and elbows along the muddy pavement of Cheapside, and proceeded towards St. Giles's. He glided along by the houses, and cleft his way through the fog with an agility not to be expected from the ordinary slowness of his movements. He soon covered the ground separating Cornhill from St. Giles's and turned into a narrow winding lane, where the atmosphere grew thicker, and the fog was so heavy and dense, that it was impossible to see a yard ahead, though it was scarce mid-day.

He pushed open a wooden door, whose worm-eaten framework was merely held together by rusty iron clamps. The house he thus entered was only one story high; but Bob Lantern did not remain in the parlour, or ascend to the first floor; he went down into the kitchens.

As he descended a heated and pestiferous atmosphere surrounded him, and fœtid smells filled his chest. Any other man would have been disgusted, perhaps suffocated; but Bob snuffled at the exhalations as a horse greets the pleasant odours of a stable. He gave vent to a grunt of pleasure, felt his pocket to assure himself that his money had escaped the dangers of the journey, and raised the latch of a door that opened into a cellar, rendered stiflingly hot by a cast-iron stove full of coke.

"Why, Temperance," he said as he entered, "you are roasting before your time."

No one answered. The red hot stove roared like a forge bellows.

"Temperance!" Bob Lantern repeated; "Temperance, you devil's whelp! will you answer me?"

A human roar mingled with that of the stove, and a grumbling voice said, in the heav stuttering of sleep—

"Another 'hicup,' Mrs. Briggs; the gin is fust class, and old Bob will pay anythink."

Lantern bounded like a tiger towards the part of the cellar wherein the voice was audible. For a moment he disappeared in the profound gloom that prevailed wherever the reddish glow of the stove did not extend, and then returned, dragging after him a motionless object—a sort of heavy bundle of considerable size. On reaching the stove, he let go, and the bundle fell back motionless.

"She is drunk as a fiddler," he said angrily. "Temperance, you devil! Temperance!"

Temperance—that was the name of the human bundle—did not stir.

"Confound it!" Bob continued; "she cannot remain here. Perhaps I shall be able to wake her."

He seized the burning poker, and put it to Temperance's nose. She started violently, and staggered to her feet. She was a tall, stout, powerful woman of forty, whose lurid complexion and bloodshot eyes betrayed her favourite passion.

"I am thirsty," she said, in a hoarse voice, as she fixed her wandering eyes on Bob.

"Oh! you are thirsty, are you, you sponge?" he replied, as he brandished his poker. "You are thirsty, are you? While I work all day to earn a few miserable coppers, you lush and get boozed. Some day, Temperance, I shall dash your brains out against the wall!"

In spite of the brutal energy of his threats, there was a tender quiver in Bob's voice as he said this.

"Stuff and nonsense, my pretty Bob!" the woman replied; "a glass more or a glass less, what's the odds? My throat is on fire—out with the 'browns.'"

"The stomach full of gin, the stove full of coke—do you think I am rich enough to go on at that rate, woman?"

Temperance had mechanically walked round the stove, on which were a glass and gin bottle, both empty.

"Not a drop!" she growled savagely. "My darling Bob, haven't you a half-crown in your pocket to please your fond little wife?"

"Half-a-crown! Why, that's a man's wages for eight hours' work. You will ruin me."

"I am thirsty," Temperance interrupted him, crouching behind the stove, and beginning to doze again.

"I must get rid of her!" Bob muttered. "If she only knew ——Woman!" he added, aloud, "hang me if I can refuse the woman I love any mortal thing! Here is a 'tanner.' Go and get some drink."

"Sixpence! my pretty Bob; make it up a lucky tenpence."

Lantern frowned, and raised the poker with a menacing air.

Temperance, to whom the thought of drinking two or three glasses more restored the use of her limbs, went up the stairs howling a song. Bob followed her softly to the street door, which he closed after her. This done, he returned.

"Is it possible," he said, as he lit a candle, "that a darling like that can have such expensive tastes? Five feet six! and a colour! You might search all St. Giles's and Lambeth, aye, and Whitechapel, and not find her ekil. Many a lord would be glad to own her for his lady. And, talking of lords, my to-day's job may lead to two ends. The Earl is a man of taste; and that little girl is one of the prettiest—not to my mind, though; I likes 'em tall; but for gentlemen who like dolls of five feet—five feet!"

Lantern proceeded to one of the corners.

"I bet," he went on, "the Earl of Whitemanor will bite famously at the bait. That Methodist dove will bring me in fifty guineas, one way or the other, if not more. That will be useful; for living is dear, and Temperance would drink Meux's dry. Still, I must allow she has her good points."

He felt one of the stones in the wall, which yielded to the pressure of his finger.

"And she's five feet six," he added, "and perhaps a trifle to boot."

The stone fell out and revealed a deep hole. Lantern looked in, and said not a word more. A greedy and passionate joy made his little eyes sparkle under his shaggy brows. He placed the candle on the ground, and went to listen at the door. Then, with two bounds, he regained his hole, and thrust in both hands. He quivered all over his body when the sound of gold being shaken emerged from the hole.

Lantern's face, illumined by the candle placed on the ground, was a sight to behold. He first patted the gold gently, just as a man caresses the dog he loves, then his hands clutched and seized the treasure convulsively. We cannot say exactly how many sovereigns this novel cash-box contained, but the hole was large,

and at times Lantern's arms disappeared in the gold up to his elbows.

At times he pulled out handsfull, which he raised above his head and threw noisily into the hole. When quite satiated with the sight of his treasure, he drew from his pocket the seven sovereigns he had received at the house of Edwardes and Co., and sent them to join the rest.

"Poor darlings," he sighed, "you were so nice and warm in my pocket. Never fear, I will come and see you again, and bring you company, please the pigs!"

He still looked, he still touched. Bob had great difficulty in parting from his dear earnings, although, after much hesitation, he replaced the stone so adroitly, that the most practised eye could not have distinguished it from the adjoining ones.

"Temperance has a fine nose when she is not drunk," he said; "but she is always drunk, and I am cleverer than she is. Besides," he added, as he unbarred the door, "am I not toiling for her, the darling?"

A few minutes later, Bob reached the topmost stair, and saw daylight again, or, rather, the thick fog that filled the streets. A few yards from his house he saw Temperance asleep with her head on a barrel in a gin palace.

"What a pity," he grunted regretfully, "a woman of five feet six, and developed in proportion."

He began his hurried progress again, and glided along past the houses. Once out of St. Giles's, Bob Lantern got into Oxford Street, and dashed along till he reached the middle of Portman Square, when he stopped in front of a noble mansion. He slipped down the area steps and entered the scullery passage, where a number of lazy footmen and grooms were talking and laughing.

"What does this beggar want?" a stable boy weighing about five stone asked.

"Kind Mr. Tulip," Bob answered, "do you remember me?"

"Some beggar."

"For shame!" Bob exclaimed, with a noble outburst of pride. Then he added to himself:

"I never beg, except in the evening for a quarter of an hour, my good little gentleman." He went on aloud, "I am your servant, Bob Lantern."

"That's him," two or three persons exclaimed; "Bob Lantern, the husband of Mrs. Temperance."

"At your service, my kind gentlemen."

"And what do you want?"

"To offer you my respects, and see, if it is possible, his Lordship's steward."

"He is engaged."

"Then it is of no consequence. But Mr. Paterson and I are old acquaintances, and I feel sure he will see my face again with pleasure."

"Oh, oh! if you are 'pals,' Master Bob, in that case, promise us your high and mighty protection. Tulip, go and announce Master Bob."

"Make way there for Master Bob."

"Master Bob Lantern!"

"The husband of Mrs. Temperance, who was christened with so much foresight."

"Happy to serve you, gentlemen, most happy," muttered Bob, as he passed bare-headed, and without losing his humble smile, through the ranks of the servants.

Bob Lantern was a prudent man.

Tulip was willing, for this occasion only, to condescend to perform the duties of groom of the chambers, and went before Bob up the stairs leading to the house.

"You will have to wait a long time, mighty Bob," he said with a grin, "for there are a good many people already in Mr. Paterson's ante-room."

"Can't help that, my good Mr. Tulip," Bob answered; "it is so hard to get a living, and I am very anxious to earn a loaf of bread; but if I must kick my heels, I don't mind."

There was, in truth, a large crowd in the steward's waiting-room. There were five or six of his Lordship's tenants, who wished to renew their leases, tradesmen, and half-a-dozen horse-dealers. Tulip opened Mr. Paterson's door slightly, and mentioned Lantern's name. The poor devils, who had been waiting several hours already, took an eager glance through the opening of the door, to see who the troublesome fellow might be whose prolonged visit prevented them paying their respects to the steward. They looked as well as they could, but saw no one save Mr. Paterson himself, who, reclining in a low-backed chair, with his feet on the hobs, was picking his teeth with great care. The tradesmen, farmers, and horsedealers fancied they did not see all the contents of the apartment.

"Lantern," Mr. Paterson repeated, without looking at Tulip, "who the jooce is Lantern?"

"It is I, please your honour," said Bob, trying to advance.

"Hi! take your turn, man, after us," the farmers, tradesmen, and horsedealers repeated in chorus.

"I fancy I know that voice," Paterson muttered, "Oh! I remember; Lantern, a clever scoundrel—let him come in."

A murmur was raised among the crowd, who actually tried to stop Bob's passage.

"My good gentlemen," Bob began, with his ordinary humility, when he spoke to people above himself.

But he had no need to expend his eloquence. Tulip seized a dirty mop, and distributed a shower of water around; all fell back growling, and Bob hastened to pass, bowing to all most politely.

"Shut the door," Mr. Paterson said to him without turning towards him.

Bob shut the door.

"Come here," the steward again said.

Bob advanced.

Mr. Paterson was a man of middle height, ripening into rotundity, with scanty auburn hair surrounding a pale face. In the midst of this face was a large nose of a blood-red hue. This nose was prodigious; it had been seen to turn pale twice or thrice during the fifty years that Mr. Paterson had passed in the world; but in these cases, by an explicable reaction, his usually yellow cheeks had become purple.

Bob, on entering, behaved like the sufferers in the ante-room; he looked all around, but saw nobody. Mr. Paterson had no other motive for not receiving them save his good pleasure and his tooth-pick. At the end of about a minute he raised his eyes to Bob and sneered.

"Let's see—you deal," he said, seeking a joke he could not find —"oh, hang it! in, in—call it Circassian slaves. You understand me, you scoundrel."

Bob began laughing heartily.

"That's a funny remark of your Honour's," he muttered: "the fact is, I do deal in slaves for cash; quite c'rect."

"You have come at an unlucky moment; that sort of goods has fallen in price; his Lordship has become reformed, and only pairs off with opera singers of the quality *di primer cartello*, if you know Italian."

"That's a loss," Bob said coolly; "a loss for his Lordship, for this is an A-one-er, Mr. Paterson."

"Very pretty," the steward remarked.

"An angel! and I would not mind betting that there are not many angels like her."

Mr. Paterson sneered for the second time.

"Horsecopers praise their horses," he said sententiously.

"Your Honour can see her."

"For what good? His Lordship is hardened agen that sort of article, my poor Jack."

"Bob, if it please your Honour. Oh, his Lordship is—— I did not exactly understand."

"Hardened—*Blazy!*—you don't understand. Well, it is a word we have from France. It means—hang it all! Angelo is played out, honest Jack."

"Bob, if it please your Honour."

"Honest Bob, then, it is difficult; tell me, have you ever eaten more slices of roast beef than your stomach could digest?"

"Rarely, your Honour, for beef is that dear!"

"Well, whether it has happened to you once or a hundred times is of little consequence. Well, on that day when you were full, you were *blazy* of beef."

"That is to say, I did not want any more?"

"Exactly. His Lordship does not want any more angels."

"Because of meeting too many. I can understand that. But in that way my wife Temperance ought to have been *blazy* of gin long ago. As for his Lordship, it is a great loss for him. Sorry to have given your Honour so much trouble for nothing."

Lantern bowed very low and walked towards the door. At the moment he reached it Mr. Paterson's voice checked him to ask, with an air he wished to appear careless—

"What's her age?"

"Something like seventeen to eighteen. Oh, your Honour, she is as fresh as a cherry, as straight as a poplar tree, graceful, fair, and modest."

"Bosh!" the steward interrupted; "and where does she live?"

"That is a part of my deal," Lantern answered with an equable smile; "the street and the number are one half the matter, and, besides, his Lordship is——I forget the word—but I know he is like myself when I have eaten too much beef—he has no appetite left."

"Listen, honest Bob; we might tickle him with sauce if she is as charming as you say."

"A hundred times more so."

"Perhaps his Lordship might see her without catching on."

"Ill be hanged if he could, your Honour."

"We will try it."

"That's my opinion."

"Since the Earl has changed his mode of life, too, my credit is beginning to sink. Can you believe, honest Jack, that his Lordship asked me the other day to make out in detail certain accounts?"

Bob assumed an air of profound stupefaction.

"Can it be possible?" he said, without laughing.

"It is only too true. The—ah—service is going to the bow-wows! It is time to call him back to the right road. I will see the girl myself."

"Very good."

"I will see her to-morrow."

"Whenever your Honour pleases."

"How much do you expect on this deal?"

Bob walked up to the fire and placed his elbow on the mantelpiece.

"I will tell you her name and give you her address for thirty pounds," he answered.

"You are mad, my worthy John," the steward exclaimed. "What! Thirty pounds for a mere address?"

"And a name—the name and address of the prettiest girl in London—what more does your Honour want? You have money enough to manage the rest in an Earl's house."

"But thirty pounds!"

"A mere trifle for a real angel." When you've seen her, you will say that poor Bob Lantern is an ass. She's worth a clear hundred guineas."

"Anyone else might have met the girl."

"London is large. Your Honour can search. I never stands in any cove's way."

Mr. Paterson reflected for a moment, then rose without saying a word, and walked to the table. Bob watched him with a greedy glance. The steward opened one of the drawers, and slowly counted out thirty sovereigns.

"It's dear," he muttered, "but the scoundrel never deceived me. He is the best nose in London for this sort of thing. And after all, it's his Lordship who pays. Come here," he continued aloud; "if you are tricking me!"

"Nonsense," Bob interrupted. "Your Honour is joking. I would not lose a customer like you for such a trifle."

"Take this."

Bob did not let it be repeated. He seized the money,

and it disappeared, as if by enchantment, in one of his vast pockets.

"Anna Macfarlane," he then said, in a low voice, Paterson writing from his dictation, "—Cornhill, opposite Finch Lane. Two sisters; an old aunt, or mother; a young chap, who may be brother or cousin."

"I do not like the chap," the steward growled.

"He is in the way; but, if necessary, I undertake removals also."

Lantern made an atrocious grin, of whose meaning no one could be mistaken. Mr. Paterson looked at him and burst into a laugh.

"Why, you must be making a fortune, honest Jack," he said at length.

"I! Living is so dear, your Honour. I have not a penny beyond the thirty pounds I have just received. Good bye, your Honour, and thank you. I will come again in a fortnight to see if you may want me—unless the lad is too much in your way."

"Come back to-morrow."

Bob gave a nod, and went out. The farmers, horsedealers, and tradesmen saw him pass with envy. He went out, bowing humbly to them. When he was gone, the steward's bell was heard, and a footman came to inform the patient waiters that Mr. Paterson would not see anybody till the next day.

Bob went his way intrepidly, but as it was four o'clock, and night was commencing, he was careful to keep guard on the pocket that contained his thirty sovereigns.

"That's a good stroke of business," he said to himself; "I'll give Temperance a share—say, sixpence."

A well-dressed gentleman stopped him at the moment he was turning into Finch Lane. Bob tried to pass, but the stranger said with a marked French accent—

"My friend, ze St. Paul's Cathédrale."

"It's a fine building," Lantern answered coolly.

"Can you tell me ze way to it?"

"Well, it's a long way round, but I will do it for two 'bob.'"

"Two 'bob'!" the Frenchman exclaimed, "for one leedle word?"

"Well. I'll do it for one 'bob' as you are a Frenchman, and not a German."

Bob held out his hand, in which the foreigner put a shilling, grumbling some abusive remark about English politeness.

"That's all right," said Bob; "well, you needn't alter your course, but follow your nose a hundred yards, and you will see St. Paul's."

"I was going there, then?" the Frenchman asked, with a look of astonishment.

"Straight."

Bob lost himself in the crowd, and leaving the Frenchman suffering from amazement and indignation that 'bang' went two sixpences.

"Now," Bob said to himself, "shall I go to the young freckle-face and tell him Mr. Edwardes's name? No. I must let things take their course. It might make him suspicious, and prevent matters going on pleasantly. Oh! What a fat bargain Mr. Paterson has made. Mr. Edwardes will put a spoke in his wheel before he has time to say Jack Robinson! But that's his business."

In consequence, Bob did not continue his journey to Finch Lane; but, as it was not time to go to bed yet, he wished to employ the rest of the day profitably, for Bob was a most hard-working fellow.

"This evening," he thought, "I will go and see my customers up in Fitzroy Square—the sawbones. Selling stiff 'uns is not the game it used to be, for they kicks up a precious rumpus if a h'arm or a leg is dropped down a h'airy; but a bloke must earn his livelihood. Meanwhile, it's a fine evening for begging: the fog's warm, and the women are coming out of their houses."

Bob, thereupon, entirely dislocated his body, and made himself look a most miserable depravity. One of his shoulders rose, while the other disappeared; his left arm, twisted in an extraordinary manner, admirably resembled paralysis. His left leg, shortened considerably, caused him to limp, and gave him such a tottering look, that it would have moved the heart of a flint.

He looked cautiously around him to make sure there was no policeman about, and a second glance showed him in the crowd an old lady in a huge black bonnet, who could only be the widow of a merchant captain. Bob crawled towards her, balancing himself like a ship tossed by tempest.

"I haven't stowed away so much as a biskit for five days and a half," he muttered, behind her back.

The lady hurried on.

"Oh, kind lady," Bob continued, "have compassion on an unhappy sailor, whom a wound received at Alexandria, under the

eyes of the Sultan, prewents from working and has reduced to the sad condition of a miserruble beggar,"

"I have nothing, my good man," the lady said.

"Alas!" Bob went on, "I shall hold out to-day once more in vain this hand which has touched the h'eighty tonner on the h'Admiral's flagship."

The lady looked at Bob's hand curiously.

"Have compassion, dear lady, or I shall turn up my toes on the pavement at your feet."

The lady felt in her huge reticule, and drew forth a crown. Bob kissed it, and promised the worthy dame all the blessings of Heaven.

"Lady," he said, hanging on to the footsteps of a second victim, who he fancied had a military man's widow's look, "you will not allow a brave soldier of the Coomassie Campaign to perish of hunger? I have thirty-five wounds, noble lady, and Kitchewayo, in person, broke my leg by a wiolent kick."

The lady gave him a shilling to get rid of him.

Bob continued this game for about an hour with various chances of success. He certainly reaped a considerable crop of shillings; but he had many rebuffs, and even half-a-dozen blows from the cane of an M.P., whom he took for a Welsh farmer.

At the moment when he was about to retire from business, he perceived an aged dame, whose appearance powerfully tempted him. Bob could not resist a temptation of that sort. He addressed the old lady, and began a poetical narrative of a battle. In the midst of his story, he felt a heavy hand laid on his shoulder.

Bob had no occasion to turn round, he recognised a policeman's clutch. With a movement rapid as lightning he straightened himself, and stooping down at the next moment, compelled the policeman to leave go; and, before the latter could assume a defensive position, Bob dealt him two terrible blows in the stomach, which resounded like a drum. The constable fell his whole length in the mud, to the great delight of the bystanders, and Lantern shot away with a quiet mind. The evening was getting on, and though he had a few other trades to which he devoted his leisure ho rs, he remembered Temperance, whose enormous stature had never appeared to him so full of charms.

"I will see the hospital gents, and her too," he said to himself. "It has not been a bad day's work, and I am tired. I should gain a pound by my night's work, and that's something; but

Temperance is expecting me, poor darling. Hang me if I wouldn't give ten shillings if she would get 'tight' only six days a week."

Bob, therefore, returned to St. Giles's. He now walked with head erect and hands in his pockets, as every honest man does whose conscience is quiet, and who has received payment for honourable daily toil.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A DUEL AS OF OLD

FRANK PERCIVAL was the younger brother of the Earl of Kirk, who had inherited nearly the whole of the paternal fortune. In spite of this unequal division, the Earl was not rich enough to make his brother an allowance, for he held an onerous position at Court. Frank was therefore compelled to lead a modest existence compared with the princely style his ancestors had maintained. He lived on a part of his mother's fortune, who resided in Scotland with her youngest daughter, twelve years of age. The Dowager-Countess loved Frank with a species of passion. He was her favourite child: in the first place, for his own sake; and secondly, because his character, face, and eye reminded her of her eldest daughter, Harriett, twin sister of Frank, who had unhappily died a few years previously.

Percival lived in London, at Heather House—his mother's property—in the neighbourhood of Cavendish Square. He had only a valet and a housekeeper, but no carriages, and no horses.

The morning was considerably advanced when MacNab reached Heather House. He was received by Percival's old manservant.

"Good morning, Jack," the young physician said. "Is not your master up yet?"

Jack was a worthy, discreet, honest, faithful, and devoted servant. He would have been a Caleb Balderstone had Percival been in the desperate condition of the master of Ravenswood. But our youth was far from that grand wretchedness of which Sir Walter Scott has given us so affecting a picture. His poverty, which was merely relative, would have been opulence for many;

hence Jack was most respectably attired, his livery was kept very clean, and he had on his face an air of prosperity which removed any idea of starvation.

He loved his master passionately, and only found in him one fault, that he had no title—he, an Honourable! the son of an Earl! whose mother was descended from the Stuarts, and quartered the arms of the Courtenays, and of Royal Scotland! Jack would have readily given three years' wages to be able to address his master by some other title than if he were only a plain country squire, while over the way there was a Sir Marmaduke Twopenny, an ex-tallow merchant and knight; so that his valet had the right to crush poor Jack by saying, two and twenty times in the hour, *Sir* Marmaduke.' Jack was tempted to break every bone in his body, but he hesitated before compromising himself with the nobility of the counter. His vengeance consisted in laying stress on the name of Twopenny, so as to show his lordly contempt, and swearing by the nine quarterings of the Percival coat of arms. He had known MacNab from his youth, and was aware of the friendship his master entertained for him. For these reasons, he forgave the young doctor for not being noble.

"Your visit will cause my master great pleasure," he said, with respected cordiality. "He often spoke of you when we were on our travels. He went out this morning at an early hour, and, as you wish to wait, I will lead you to his study."

The Scot went into the study. It was a room a description of which would offer no interest to the reader. A good many books, some objects of art, two or three family pictures, and a large coat of arms formed the ornaments. MacNab sat down by the fire.

"Nothing has been changed," he said; "here are the authors we both like, and the portrait of poor Lady Harriett."

Jack bowed sadly.

"Why, that," MacNab continued, "is the statue of the last Queen of Naples. Frank is still a knight errant, then! And there, too, is the old coat of arms."

"Would you like me, sir, to explain the quarterings to you?" the old valet quickly remarked.

"Another time, old boy," said MacNab.

"I shall always be at your orders, sir."

That was Jack's answer, but he added to himself, "It is easy to see that he is not aristocratic, or he would have said, 'I know all about it.'"

"Hallo! your master's swords are not in the trophy," MacNab said suddenly.

Jack turned pale and trembled.

"It is true," he stammered; "you are right, sir. May Heaven have mercy on us!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the Scotchman, starting up.

"My master went out early," Jack answered, with a choking sensation in his throat; "so early, that I was still abed. I did not see him. He must have taken his swords with him."

"What for? They don't use swords in the fencing-school!" MacNab interrupted.

"And he has not returned!" the old valet said, falling back into an easy chair.

MacNab began walking hurriedly up and down.

"Can he have become so foreignised as to think of a duel—to fight a duel? How absurd! and yet, with that foreigner in question. Oh, Heaven! it may be a duel! Jack, do you believe he would fight a duel?"

Jack shook his grey head slowly, but not in doubt.

"All that affects the honour of a Percival is of importance," he said; "and my master is not one of those who run to solicitors about questions of honour, or take out their weapons not to use them. And it is just twelve o'clock. He has been away for seven hours. Good Heaven!" he added, "you will not permit old Jack to see him dead!"

"My poor Jack," interposed MacNab, trying to encourage himself, "we are alarming ourselves unnecessarily. Frank cannot have had a serious quarrel since yesterday."

"My master has seen nobody, and only went out to proceed to Lord Trevor's ball."

"Lord Trevor!" exclaimed the Scotchman, seeing all at a glance. Then he added with anxiety:

"The Marquis de Rio Santo."

Jack looked at him without understanding.

"What Marquis?" he repeated disdainfully. "Oh, that Marquis de Rio Santo. All those foreigners are Marquises at the least; they would believe themselves dishonoured were they only Barons. My master does not know any Marquises."

"Rio Santo," MacNab repeated; "they must have met. Where can I enquire or learn?"

"Where shall I run?" Jack added. "For mercy's sake, sir, have compassion on a poor old man. I did not understand your words, but I fancied I guessed. Oh! if you know where my master is, tell me. I will run if I fall dead by the way. I will try to help him. My master," he went on, clasping his hands, and with tears in his eyes, "my little Francis, whom I carried in my arms, whom I nursed, whom I love!"

MacNab, whose present anxiety was heightened by Jack's despair, walked to the window and mechanically drew aside the curtain. At this moment a coach was heard coming along.

"There is a fatality on the noble old house," Jack went on; "nearly all the Percivals, from father to son, have fallen in duels, and the motto that surrounds their shield seems a constant threat."

The medical student turned round to read it.

"*Mors ferro, nostra mors!* (Death by the sword is our special death!)"

He turned away from the motto in horror. He fancied he could see blood on the emblazoned shield, and tears rolling from the eyes of the ancestors who hung on the walls.

"Death by the sword is our special death!" old Jack repeated. "The last time I heard those words pronounced it was from the lips of the late Earl. He uttered them while accompanying to the tomb the body of his eldest son, who fell in single combat."

MacNab did not hear him, for the carriage had now stopped before the house. Two strangers got out, and, helped by the driver, raised a lifeless object lying on one of the cushions. The spectator uttered a piercing cry.

"Frank! my poor Frank!" he said, as he rushed out. Jack went to the window and looked down.

"My master!" he muttered, as he fell heavily back. "And death by the sword is our special death!"

He was in a fainting fit; and when he recovered his senses, he found himself at the same spot where he had fallen. No one had thought of attending to him. He looked dully and heavily round the room, but it was empty. Suddenly his eye fell on the coat of arms with the Latin motto. It was a thunderbolt that struck him to the heart.

"My master!" he said, with a piercing cry. "A duel! blood! I saw Mr. Percival's corpse!"

"Silence!" a strange voice said, through the door, which was ajar. "On your life, silence!"

The door closed again. Jack rose on his knees and crawled up to it.

"I can hear nothing!" he muttered, as he put his ear to the crack; "nothing! What can be going on? Is he alone? or——"

Jack had not the strength to finish his thought. A slight noise was made in the adjoining room. It was like the grating of knife and steel being softly rubbed against each other. Jack

raised himself and placed his eye to the keyhole. He saw, in the centre of the room, his master's bed, which had been drawn out for the sake of having more light. Upon it Percival was lying motionless, with closed eyes, livid face, and flaccid limbs, like those of a corpse. Cloths, stained with blood, were lying about on the carpet, while, near the window, MacNab was seated.

On either side of the bed stood a stranger: one, dressed in black, with a face of marble, was feeling the insensible man's pulse, while the other had his sleeves turned up. His blood-stained hands held a long steel instrument, the end of which disappeared under poor Percival's bloody shirt. The second person was as unmoved as the first, and he it was who had opened the door to order silence.

The man dressed in black, doubtless a physician, continued to feel the pulse. The other stranger, apparently his assistant, introduced the probe, and felt the wound, while shaking his head with an air of uncertainty. He uttered a few words, which Jack could not overhear, to which the man in black responded by a strange smile.

"What did he say?" poor Jack asked himself; "and what does that queer smile mean? Is it a foreboding, or his safety?"

The assistant at this moment drew out the blood-stained probe, and coldly measured the depth and extent of the wound. Jack could endure it no longer; he gently turned the handle, and the door opened. The two physicians paid no attention to it, and Jack was enabled to hear, though he could no longer see.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE PHIAL

THE assistant was the first to speak.

"Half a line further," he whispered, "and the bronchial artery would have been touched."

"Half a line!" the man in black said in the same tone. "Are you quite sure, Rowley, that the artery has escaped?"

"Quite sure, sir."

A momentary silence followed these words. Jack, who could hear nothing, wished to begin seeing again, and, drawing back, put his eye once more to the keyhole. The assistant had handed the probe to his master. His right hand was thrust into his bosom, and in the other he held a bundle of lint.

"Lint!" poor Jack thought, as a sigh of relief burst from his breast: "then they hope to save him."

He had understood nothing of the two practitioners' scientific conversation, but his common sense taught him that the application of a remedy is a guarantee of hope, for people do not attend to the doomed.

He still looked. The assistant, before withdrawing the hand he had concealed under his coat, took a cautious glance at Mac Nab, who still remained, mourning, motionless, as it were—insensible. He gave the physician a nod to look at him. The latter made a shade of his hand to examine the bystander attentively. This double movement surprised Jack. Why this distrust? Why these precautions? The doctor let his hand fall, and opened his mouth to speak. Jack put his ear to the crevice.

"That young man sees nothing," the doctor said in a low voice; "do as I ordered you."

There was a fresh silence. When Jack, more and more puz-

zled, looked through the keyhole a second time, he saw the assistant draw from his chest a small phial, whose crystal stopper he quickly turned. He put the lint to it, but before pouring any of the fluid out, he gave another glance at MacNab—such a glance that Jack's heart bounded in his bosom. He did not stir. The doctor gave an imperious nod, and Rowley poured one drop of the contents of the phial on the lint.

At this moment the Scot made a movement. Rowley trembled and turned pale. Instead of applying the lint to the wound, he let it fall on the ground, and put his foot on it.

The terrible suspense which had for a few moments been rising in Jack's brain now became a certainty. He looked round for a weapon; seeing a claymore hanging on the wall, he seized it, burst open the door, and rushed into the room where his master lay.

"Mr. MacNab!" he shouted; "do you not see what is going on here?"

"Silence!" said Rowley, with all sorts of gesticulations, and pointing to the wounded man.

"Silence yourself," Jack answered; "wretched murderer, I was there——" He pointed to the door. "And I saw all!"

Rowley instinctively fell back towards the door.

"Is this man mad?" the doctor asked, addressing MacNab. "Pray make him leave the room, or I will not answer for Mr. Percival's life."

The Scotchman had risen and looked in turn at Jack and Rowley, who had succeeded in regaining his coolness.

"Silence, Jack!" he said at length; "and do you, doctor, in Heaven's name, finish this dressing, which I fear has been too long delayed."

Jack placed himself between his master and the doctor.

"Sir," he said in a respectful but firm voice, addressing MacNab, "I will obey your orders because you are my master's friend; but this man shall not touch him, I swear, by Heaven!"

"The fellow is mad," the physician replied haughtily; "he will kill the gentleman by delaying the dressing as surely as if he stabbed him to the heart with the weapon he holds in his hand."

Jack trembled from head to foot. A cold perspiration broke out on his bald head, but he did not stir.

"I saw," he said in a low and deep voice. "Do not doubt what I am going to say, Mr. MacNab, for I swear by the memory of my dead father—and I never told a falsehood—an assassination

has been attempted—here—at this very moment—in your presence. Oh! I saw it. I tell you these men wished to kill my master."

The Scot fixed a profound and searching glance on Dr. Moore.

"This servant is the worthiest man I know, sir," he said; "on the other hand, I am aware that Dr. Moore is one of the most illustrious members of the Royal College, and I bow to his profound learning and knowledge; but this gentleman is my dearest friend, so pardon my foolish doubts, and allow me to assist you in the dressing you are going to perform. I am an Oxford Bachelor of Medicine."

He hurriedly turned up his cuffs.

"Take care, sir," said Jack, "take care."

He hurriedly approached the young man and whispered a ew sentences in his ear. While he was doing so Rowley quietly stooped and picked up the lint under his foot. Then he looked at the Doctor, who gave an almost imperceptible wink. Rowley understood it and slipped off.

"It is impossible!" MacNab said, in answer to the old valet's statement.

"Impossible, sir? Well, if I have to search the villain to the skin, I will find that phial."

He turned to Rowley, and MacNab imitated him. It was only then that they perceived his flight.

"Well, sir," Jack exclaimed, "do you believe me now?"

The Northerner fixed on the doctor his piercing and stern eye. Dr. Moore had folded his arms, and remained motionless, following the whole scene with a calm and disdainful glance.

Dr. Moore was one of the most influential and honourable members of the College of Surgeons. His reputation was immense, and certainly raised him above all suspicion. At the first moment that followed Percival's arrival, his friend, struck to the heart, but who would doubtless have overcome his moral weakness had not Dr. Moore's presence been a guarantee that all that was proper would be done, had yielded to his grief, and closed his eyes, like gamblers who resolve not to open them again till Fortune has decided. As we have seen, he was promptly awakened.

What we have described in so many lines had happened in a few minutes. When Rowley left Heather House again he had not been in it the eighth part of an hour. Hence, then, but ten minutes at the most had been lost in dressing Frank's wound.

"Dr. Moore," MacNab said, his natural coolness gaining the victory over his imagination, "this worthy servant is no madman. He saw what he describes, as the flight of that villain sufficiently proves."

"Would you dare to accuse me, sir?"

"Let us lose no time in vain words, if you please. I insist upon your operating at once upon Mr. Percival. At once! You understand!"

"At once!" Dr. Moore repeated; "why, that resembles an order, sir."

"It is one," said the Scot fiercely.

The doctor frowned and fell back a step. His hands were plunged into the pockets of his coat, and his whole person assumed a menacing aspect. All at once his brow grew calm, while a bitter smile played round his lips.

"Mr. Oxford Bachelor," he said, with forced gaiety, "prepare the bandages and lint. I am ready to dress the gentleman's wound."

The operation was begun at once, and was of a singular nature. Dr. Moore, incessantly dominated by the practiced glances of his young colleague, displayed all the resources of that surgical practice which had so greatly aided to raise his reputation above that of his rivals. He operated rapidly and surely, and showed a sort of ostentation in omitting none of the details commanded by clinical surgery under such circumstances.

MacNab, while obeying his orders with minute punctuality, followed each of his movements with an eye full of anxiety, which the doctor tried to avenge by retaining his bitter and mocking smile. Behind him stood Jack, who had not yet put off his anxiety. He still held the old claymore in his hand, and constantly watched MacNab's face.

He waited, ready to strike without mercy at the slightest sign from the young physician. No pity was to be hoped for from him; it might even be said that he would have been delighted to catch Dr. Moore tripping, in order to have the opportunity to avenge the cowardly trick attempted on his dying master.

The doctor turned his back on him, but could see his face reflected in a mirror. Perhaps this guardsman contributed to give a mathematical precision to his movements. Still, as the operation went on, old Jack's heart gradually softened. He retained his terrible look, but inwardly became himself again. When Percival opened his eyes for the first time again, the flash in Jack's eye was extinguished by a tear, and did not return.

When the dressing was finished, a ruddy tinge returned to

the wounded man's white lips. Jack began smiling through his tears, and the old broadsword fell from his hands.

"Heaven bless you!" he muttered, behind Dr. Moore's back. "And the Lord forgive me if I was mistaken in accusing you just now."

The doctor did not deign either to turn round or to answer.

"This gentleman is saved," he said to MacNab. "In inexperienced hands, his wound might have been mortal, but now all human precautions possible are taken, and I answer for him."

The Scotchman bowed, and drew a five-pound note from his pocket-book, which he handed to the doctor; but he declined acceptance.

"I have nothing more to do here," he said, taking up his cane and gloves. "I suppose, sir, that you do not intend to detain me any longer?"

"You are free, sir," answered the other.

"Very good," said Dr. Moore, as he proceeded to the door.

He stopped the moment he reached the threshold, put one hand into his pocket again, and turned round.

"Now that you declare me free," he said, laying a stress on the last word, "I wish to let you know, my young master, that I was always so. In our profession—you have yet to learn it—men are often exposed to dangerous snares. It is the first lesson of prudence never to let one's self be taken unawares."

The doctor drew his hand from his pocket, holding a revolver.

"This," he continued, "is an argument which Oxford does not teach, but London does, my young master. I know none more peremptory. As you see, I had ample means for forcing a passage, and had not much to fear from your old fanatical Highlander's rusty cutlass. But I did not wish to leave this room without opposing to a senseless suspicion a natural proof of my honesty. I saved this gentleman because such was my duty and proper intention."

He returned his pistol to its place.

"And now, good bye, my young gentleman," he said again. "You have made a mortal enemy of me to-day. In my life I have never forgotten or forgiven anything, and I have always had my revenge."

The door opened, then closed on Dr. Moore.

MacNab had coldly listened to the first part of the doctor's speech; the menace contained in the second part he only answered by a calm and silent bow. Jack had paid no attention to this incident, for he was kneeling by his master's bedside and kissing his cold brow. MacNab also returned to Frank's bedside.

"What can I believe?" he muttered; "can I reasonably suppose an assassination? For what purpose, and especially when the assassin is Dr. Moore? Jack, are you quite sure you saw it?"

"As sure, sir, as I am of seeing you," Jack answered as he rose. "The villain held in one hand the little bottle, in the other the lint. At a sign from that doctor—who may be a worthy man for all this—the apothecary moistened the lint. At that moment you moved—the apothecary hid the phial the deuce knows where, and let the lint drop, on which he set his foot. Stay, it must be there still!"

Jack walked round the bed, and the gentleman followed him.

"No!" the old valet continued; "the lint has disappeared, but the mark can still be seen."

"The mark!" interrupted the other; "where?"

Jack showed him a damp stain about the size of a shilling, produced by the pressure of Rowley's foot on the lint. MacNab went on his knees to examine the mark, and, in stooping, perceived under the bed a microscopic phial, which he seized.

"That's the phial!" old Jack exclaimed.

MacNab unstoppered it, and put it to his nostrils; but he violently threw his head back, for the phial contained Prussic acid.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE COUNTESS OF LANCEWOOD

LADY OPHELIA woke on the morrow of the ball at Trevor House long after noon. Her delicate features bore traces of fatigue, her wearied eyes refused to open, and the recollections of the ball crossed her brain confusedly. It was cold, in spite of the huge fire lit in the bed-room; and the Countess, instead of rising, drew the clothes more closely round her, and tried to go to sleep again.

But the hour for rising had arrived, and, instead of sleep, painful thoughts, which she did not desire, flocked in. Her life passed before her as a panorama. She saw her youth, whose path was strewn with flowers, her wifehood, her widowhood. How envied, how happy she had been. And then, again, she saw herself conquered, trembling, weak, and a thousandfold happier than she had been before. She loved—loved for the first time—at the age of four-and-twenty. How rapidly those hours of discreet pleasure slipped away; how delicious was that silence, only broken by the voice of the man she loved.

Alas! the hours now passed sadly and heavily—the solitude was empty, the silence mortal. All was dull and gloomy now.

The Countess threw off the warm bed clothes, leaped out, and thrust her little feet into tiny slippers. Perhaps she had never done so much before without the help of a lady's-maid. Suddenly struck by the cold, she hastily put on her dressing gown, and sought refuge in an easy chair by the fireside.

Ophelia stretched out her hands to seize the bell-rope. At this moment there was a loud knock at the front door, and the Countess suddenly started up. Her eyes sparkled, a beam of hope illumined her brow.

"Suppose it were Rio Santo?" she thought.

But this hope lasted but a short while. Ophelia suddenly remembered the events of the past evening. Her face became gloomy again.

"It is that young Percival," she said to herself. "He has come for the information I promised him. But I will not now divulge that terrible secret. No, I will not!"

A lady's-maid gently opened the door.

"My lady has risen?" she said with surprise. "A gentleman wishes to pay his respects to you. Here is his card."

"It is not Mr. Percival," the Countess said, after a glance at the card, on which was engraved the name of Stephen MacNab. "I cannot see any one, Jane. Stay; pull up the blind; there is something written in pencil on the card."

Jane drew up the blind, and a brighter light shone into the room.

"From Mr. Percival," Ophelia said. "What can this mean? Jane, tell them to show the gentleman into the drawing-room, and come back to dress me at once. What can it mean?" the Countess repeated, when the lady's-maid had left the room; "From Mr. Percival. I am sure that the young man has done something desperate."

Jane returned, and the Countess ordered her merely to brush her hair and hook her dress, and hardly allowed her time to perform the order.

"That will do, Jane," she said. "Let me go."

MacNab was waiting in the drawing room. The young physician was not accustomed to talk every day with the widow of a Knight of the Garter; but he had just left the bed on which his best friend lay, and he had no room for thoughts of self-esteem. He bowed to the Countess with as much coolness as a constant visitor at St. James's would have done.

"Madam," he said, "pray forgive my intrusion. I have not had the honour of being introduced to you; but I am fulfilling a duty, and have come to deliver a message from Mr. Frank Percival."

The Countess bowed, and pointed to a chair.

"Mr. Percival was unable to come himself?" she asked.

"He could not come," MacNab answered, mournfully; "and it required a very real impossibility to keep him from doing so."

"What has happened to him, sir?"

"Frank has been wounded in a duel, madam."

"In a duel?" the Countess repeated. "I never heard of such a thing. Abroad?"

"Here, in town! Seriously wounded?"

"By whom, sir?"

"He has not told his adversary's name."

"And you have no suspicion?"

"Pardon me; suspicion? My impression is equal to a certainty. But I have come to you on Percival's behalf, and will do what he would have done—forget this duel, to occupy myself with a more important affair."

"More important, sir?" the Countess murmured, with some display of uneasiness.

"Hardly two hours ago," exclaimed the visitor, "Percival was brought back to Heather House in a fainting, dying state. A terrible event, which I cannot explain to you, delayed assistance being offered him, and my unhappy friend was within an ace of dying before my very eyes—the victim of an assassin!"

"You make me shudder," said the Countess. "A murder attempted on a wounded man?"

"A poisoning of his wound, lady."

"And do you think, can you believe, that Mr. Percival's adversary—it would be too horrible—was in any way mixed up in this cowardly scheme?"

MacNab did not answer at once. He had not yet asked himself the question, and a vague suspicion crossed his mind. But nothing gave body to the suspicion, and he answered, "I cannot believe that, my lady."

"The Countess drew a deep breath of relief.

"At any rate," MacNab went on, "the danger is avoided. When Percival regained the power of speech, about half an hour ago, the first word he uttered was the name of a person dear to him."

"Miss Trevor?"

MacNab bowed, and continued.

"The second was your ladyship's."

The Countess's embarrassment increased.

"My name?" she said. "Oh, yes; I think I know why. Last night, at the ball at Trevor House, I asked Mr. Percival to call. I am really most sorry that his wound should have prevented him——"

"He has sent me in his place, madam."

"You, sir? Mr. Percival cannot suppose—what I had to say to him was of such a confidential nature that——"

"I am his bosom friend."

"I do not doubt it, sir, but I cannot——"

"Percival is suffering greatly, madam, and awaiting——" MacNab interrupted her.

"You press me, sir; listen."

The Countess suddenly stopped and eagerly listened. The dull sound of a rap at the front door was audible.

"It is he!" she murmured, "it is he!"

Her uneasiness became a feverish agitation.

"Sir," she went on, "this interview must finish at once. I refuse to accept you as mediator between myself and Mr. Percival. Do not judge me lightly, sir, for my motives are very serious; and pray do not feel insulted, for these motives have nothing of a personal nature."

The Scot had risen.

"I hoped to convey consolation to poor Percival," he began

"Tell him," the Countess exclaimed, "tell him that he shall know all; tell him——"

"The Marquis wishes to see your Ladyship," a footman interrupted, who opened the door of the drawing-room.

"Say nothing to him, sir; I will think over it. Show his Lordship into the boudoir, William. Beg Mr. Percival to excuse me, sir; let him know what sympathy I feel with his accident, and be kind enough to pardon me for breaking off this interview so suddenly."

The Northerner bowed coldly, and left the room. The Countess fell back, exhausted, into an easy chair.

"No," she murmured, "oh, no! I cannot reveal that secret; it would ruin me. Inspire me, oh Heaven!"

On going down the stairs he came in contact with a gentleman whose hat partially concealed his features. The latter gave him a side glance, and slightly started. A moment after, the footman threw open the drawing-room door and announced—

"The Marquis."

Rio Santo respectfully raised to his lips the hand of the Countess, and remained standing before her. There was on his handsome features something that resembled devotion, tenderness, and compassion; but that something was a mask whose fittings a practised observer would have perceived, cleverly though they were made. The Countess was a good observer, but lost all her skill in Rio Santo's presence. She looked at him for a moment in silence. Her eyes, at first sad and sorrowful, gradually brightened till they expressed calmness. The Marquis smiled gently, and leant over the back of the chair.

"You were very lovely yesterday, Ophelia," he murmured in her ear.

The Countess turned, and her forehead almost touched Rio Santo's mouth. She lowered her head in confusion.

"You are angry with me," he continued, "and have a right to be so, for it is very wrong to cause you pain, even involuntarily. You know my secret—however, my entire secret. Is it not love to confide in you so unreservedly?"

"You have not seen me for a fortnight," the Countess said in a low voice, and tears filled her eyes.

"But I have come to-day, Ophelia, without calculating the danger, for I suffered too much by the absence. Believe me, I regret as much as you do—perhaps more than you do—those days when we were uncontrollably happy; more than you, I curse the fatality that urges me onward. But no one can escape his destiny. I must attain my object, or perish."

Rio Santo had risen. His noble face assumed an expression of indomitable and unbounded pride. Lady Ophelia looked at him for a few seconds, and then said, clasping her hands:

"Oh, I love you. Heaven has no pity. I love you more than ever. I shall always love you."

"Thanks, Ophelia, thanks," Rio Santo said, bending his knee; "if you but knew what strength one word of yours gives to my heart, what thoughts to my head. You are my genius and my hope. I love you, and shall love you for ever."

He sat down on a stool at the foot of the Countess, who thrust her hands among his curling black locks.

"You are speaking the truth?" she murmured. "You are not deceiving me? That love you give me—that secret and shame-faced love, which is the part my rival does not care for, I cling to, José Maria. I cling to it more than life, more than honour. Oh! it is I who am to blame for being only a poor doting woman, and daring to hope that you, Rio Santo, will stoop to me."

"Foolish child," the Marquis interrupted her, while covering her white hand with kisses.

She ceased to speak; her tears had dried, and her eyes had become burning. Her hurried breathing caused her lovely bosom to heave. There was now love, real love in Rio Santo's flashing glance. This man of sudden impressions yielded to the impression of the moment: he had come to play a farce, and, like thousands who regard seriously a part they have learned, he yielded to the passionate fiction.

The Countess enjoyed this instant of happiness, and clung to it as if fearful of seeing the illusion fly away.

"Oh, no!" she said at last, not knowing that her thoughts were escaping her; I will not betray him. What do I care for others and their sufferings? He loves me now. I will say nothing—nothing!"

But Rio Santo had heard every word she uttered. He frowned, and in the centre of his flaming forehead stood out the long white line of a perpendicular scar. His lips trembled, and a shudder of passion agitated his whole body.

He seized the Countess's hand, and, doubtless, squeezed it very violently, for the poor woman opened her eyes and uttered a little cry of pain. She turned pale on noticing the menacing attitude and convulsed features of the Marquis.

"What is the matter, Don José?" she asked.

"Madam," he said, in a stern and concentrated voice, "you must answer me—answer me distinctly and on the spot. Whom are you talking about betraying, and who was the man I met just now on the stairs?"

## CHAPTER XVI.

### GATHERING STORMS

THE Countess, suddenly aroused from her dreams, looked at the Marquis with terror.

"I am waiting for your Ladyship's reply," he said coldly.

"And what do you want of me?"

"You spoke about betraying, I tell you; you had an idea of it; and I have just seen a man quit you. That man is a friend of Frank Percival."

"It is true; he came from him."

"From him?" Rio Santo repeated bitterly. "I saw you talking last night with Percival; I noticed you exchanging meaning glances. Do you know that nothing escapes my notice, and that, even when my eyes are closed, there are a hundred present to watch in their stead?"

"I know that you are powerful," the Countess replied, raising her lovely head with calm pride—"powerful for evil, like the fallen angels. But I do not fear you."

"You do not fear me!" Rio Santo repeated, his voice full of threats.

"I love you, alas, I love you, and that's bad enough!" the Countess said, after a silence, and with a sudden expression of heart-broken despair.

A triumphant smile played for a second round Rio Santo's lips, and he exclaimed, in a voice that no longer displayed anger:

"Ophelia, you must pardon these outbursts of sudden wrath in which I give vent to my secret suffering. I am unhappy, as you know. Two passions divide my soul between them and carry on a contest which is killing me my love for you——"

The Countess raised her lovely eyes to Heaven.

"My love for you," Rio Santo continued resolutely, "and my unbounded ambition. This man, this Frank Percival, was in my way, and I removed him. On my honour, I took pity on the boy, who, after all, was yesterday only an innocent obstacle; but this boy insulted me like a man, and I was obliged to punish him as we men do in other countries."

"It was really you, then?" the Countess remarked.

"You were informed of it?"

"Ah, what you call your love has ofttimes the appearance of hatred."

"Yes, it was I; but while punishing him I felt pity for him. Instead of killing him mercilessly, as it was my right and interest to do, I merely disabled him."

"That is grand and generous!" the Countess said warmly. "Alas! you still possess noble sentiments, and it is they that ruin me."

"Of what use has my clemency been to me?" Rio Santo went on. "You made an appointment with him yesterday, and he expected to find some weapon here to injure me. Do not deny it, lady; and his first thought on recovering that life which he owes to me is to send his confidant to you. But what urges you to destroy me, Ophelia? You wish to avenge yourself, perhaps, and on one more unhappy than you."

"No, no," the Countess replied; "I do not desire vengeance. Nothing urges me to injure you. Accident, or rather, your pitiless anger, made me mistress of a terrible secret. I can never think of that dreadful scene without shuddering, and at times, I allow, this mystery of blood weighs on my conscience."

"Then you have never been jealous?" Rio Santo asked, with an insinuating and tender expression in his voice.

"I am so now."

"Well, cannot you understand how an outburst of jealousy——"

"Silence; not a word more!" the Countess interrupted him.

Rio Santo bowed his head before this reproach. He had attempted falsehood, and it ashamed and disgusted him, although crime, perhaps, did not horrify him. There were between him and the Countess many love secrets; but there was another secret as well, which, if revealed, would have stopped Rio Santo's dearest plans and endangered his life. Now he had acquired a certainty that Ophelia—either through vengeance, jealousy, or some other motive, had formed the idea of revealing it. His sus-

picions had been aroused on the previous evening, and that was the motive of his visit.

Now that he knew the danger, it was necessary to prevent it. His cause was bad, and his position difficult. He had suddenly deserted the Countess while keeping up with her before society those courteous relations which a gentleman can never forget. His pursuit of Miss Trevor was public, and through him the Countess had lost reputation, rest, and happiness.

But the Countess loved him, which was a consolation, for all that.

The Marquis, trusting to his advantage, employed all his resources, and won the game—at any rate, he had reason to believe he had gained it. The Countess listened to him in delight; she plunged into the sea of happiness she had fancied dried up; she found her hope, her youth, her love once again. Oh! what a reception would she then have given to any one who might have asked her to betray Rio Santo's secrets!

R o Santo was eloquent, but he unfortunately went beyond his object. Wishing to convince Ophelia that he loved her, he said that his ambition and his affection for her were struggling.

"At such moments," he went on, "I hesitate and suffer the more. I know that it would be death to me to give up my plans; but I ask myself whether it would not be better to die with you, Ophelia, than live without you."

"Then you do not love her?" the Countess asked.

"Poor Mary! I should like to love her as she deserves; but between her and me there is your image!"

"If I could believe you loved me, Don José?" the Countess murmured, with a strange expression.

"Believe it! believe it, Ophelia!" the Marquis cried, carried away by a sudden and true passion; "if my object—which occupies and kills me—were one day to disappear from my sight——"

"You will become again what you once were to me, Don José?"

"Have I changed? What must I say to convince you? I would return to your feet, cured, perhaps, of that unhappy ambition which devours me."

"Perhaps!" the Countess repeated, thoughtfully; "and you would be wholly mine?"

"Wholly."

The conversation went on, tender and gentle, and hours slipped away. Who, in Rio Santo's place, would not have believed the victory complete? Still, from this moment the Countess ap-

peared absent-minded; a secret thought, whether of hope or fear, seemed to absorb her attention.

"I am going, this evening, to Covent Garden," she at length said; "will you accompany me?"

"I will escort you, Ophelia; but I have a seat in Lady Champbell's box."

"Though your offer is so limited, I accept it. Be kind enough to wait for me a moment."

She rang, and Jane received orders to prepare her mistress's toilet. Rio Santo remained alone in the drawing-room.

The reader would be mistaken were he to take literally the words uttered by Rio Santo in the heat of the conversation. Rio Santo deceived himself when he told the Countess that ambition alone made him kneel to Miss Trevor. He loved Mary—loved her, perhaps, more than he had ever done Ophelia.

As for what he called his ambition, it was a powerful, patient, indomitable feeling, which possibly deserved another name. Rio Santo had a vast object before him; his glance was directed high, and his arm was strong enough to reach the point to which his glance extended. What he had at the bottom of his mind no one knew. He walked with a firm and sure step along gloomy paths. The means he employed were unusual, to say the least of them; but whether the end justified these means, the reader has yet to learn.

From the preceding our readers can see that the Marquis went a great deal too far when he said to the Countess, "*You know my whole secret.*" The poor woman had surprised by accident only one of the links of a long chain of mysteries, and that was all. This isolated secret certainly possessed a terrible range of itself, but it opened up no road for the discovery of the rest.

While Rio Santo was instituting comparisons between Ophelia and Mary Trevor, the Countess hurriedly made her toilet, and quite astounded her lady's-maid by the little care she devoted to this important operation.

"Thank you, Jane," the Countess said, with that air which really means, "Thank Heaven, it is finished!"

"Shall I not dress your Ladyship's hair?"

"No, Jane."

"Will you not have some flowers in your hair?"

"No, Jane; you can go. Stay, bring me the writing materials."

"My Lady forgets that his Lordship——"

The Countess stopped her by a start of nervous impatience, and Jane hastened to obey.

"You can go," her mistress said, when the lady's maid had brought the writing materials.

Jane went away, giving the Countess a cunning look of amazement.

"I must! I must!" the Countess muttered, as she dipped her pen in the inkstand. "Did he not tell me that, if he failed——"

She stopped and laid down the pen.

"Goodness!" she went on, after a moment's silence. "I do not know! I do not know!"

She placed her head between her hands, and reflected for a moment, then she seized the pen again and rapidly wrote a few lines.

"I will ask his word," she said, "his word of honour. Frank is a gentleman. I will make him promise; I must, for I cannot live in this state of suspense; and the hope renders me mad."

She folded the letter, which she addressed to "The Honourable Frank Percival." She left it on the table, and returned to the drawing-room.

"You will at once post the letter lying on my dressing-table," she said to Jane, before leaving the house.

An instant after Rio Santo's splendid horses were dashing in the direction of Covent Garden. At the moment when the Marquis got out before the theatre and offered his hand to the Countess, a man touched his arm, thrust a piece of paper into his hand, and at once disappeared in the crowd. Rio Santo, while ascending the steps, unfolded the paper, and read—

"Left-hand side, No. 3, the Princess de Longueville."

"An unique opportunity," he muttered, as he gave a side glance at the Countess; "the Princess will make a glorious entrance into London society."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE PIPE AND POT

On this evening there was a German performance at Covent Garden. The ordinary actors were resting to make room for German artistes, who were about to perform an opera of Wagner. It was not Italian, but still a foreign work, performed by foreigners; hence the nobility and gentry could go to the theatre to admire without compromising their taste for all that is extraneous.

By half-past five there was a crowd round the theatre. The neighbouring public-houses, on lighting up, displayed their interiors full of customers, and the police were beginning to show their oil-kin capes. In London, when the police show themselves, the thieves are not far off. We might be inclined to fancy that the latter follow them; for, of a verity, it is not the police who watch the thieves, it is they who dog and watch them.

Hedging the approaches, numerous groups were standing, or awaiting the opening of the doors.

From one group to the other proceeded handsomely-dressed girls, who, after two or three turns, went to refresh in some public-house. In the street, these wretched creatures seemed to deserve the title of "girls" we have just given them; but, on regarding them more closely, in the gin-shops, you could notice that many of them had not passed the boundary of childhood. There were children of thirteen and fourteen mixed up with female veterans in infamy.

Among them could be seen exquisite girls, with angelic faces, delicate features, and chaste eyes. Some of them could still blush; but there were little demons of fourteen, who could have read the most practised hands a lesson. They went up to the

waiting crowds at the entrances to pick pockets, to vend programmes and oranges, or even to strike up acquaintances who would buy them tickets and treat them to drink during the evening.

Lastly, close opposite to the theatre, there is a lane running, with many windings into Drury Lane, where another class of cadgers and fruitsellers may be found, who in their too ragged garb, rarely venture into the gas-lit thoroughfares in the vicinity.

One of the public-houses in this lane, situated half way between Bow Street and Drury Lane, retained a sort of decent appearance, and seemed to regret better days. This tavern, the handsomest and best in Broad Court, was known as the Pipe and Pot.

At this moment—that is to say—about half an hour before the opening of the theatre, it was only occupied by two or three seedy-looking customers drinking in the parlour. Now and then one of the poor girls to whom we have alluded would enter, toss off a glass of gin, and then resume her quest.

As the hour for the performance drew nearer other customers arrived and drank at the bar.

"Come in, Mike, my own dear brother-in-law," a little, sharp, broken voice said outside. "Go first. I am a gentleman, I am, and know the rules of politeness."

Almost immediately two couples walked through and entered the parlour. There was something curious about them. The first was composed of a girl who might be about fifteen, holding the arm of a stout fellow of five-and-twenty. This girl combined all we have said of the young demons who are the crying sin of great cities. She was frail, thin, and of a frightful pallor, badly concealed by a thick coating of coarsely-rubbed "red." Her form, prematurely arrested in its youth by excess, was that of a woman in miniature. Her worn face allowed you to guess a beauty nipped in the bud, but so denaturalised that hardly a trace was left that could be recognised. Her eyes, covered with swollen eyelids, had that bold look which never knew modesty, while her mouth opened convulsively to make way for the hoarse outbursts of a broken and panting voice.

Her name was "Consumptive Loo."

Her friend, who was called Mike, had nothing peculiar in his appearance or face. He was simply a rough vagabond, with a stout carcass developed by stolen beef and ale, with red hair, and a ruddy face. The only remarkable thing about him was the contrast that he offered to his girl. Loo, in fact, whatever she

might do, literally hung on his arm, round which her little hand was clasped.

The second couple exactly contrasted with the first. It was composed of a tall woman, with a harsh, impudent air, and quite a lad.

The woman was dressed in a Mary Stuart bonnet, a man's Ulster, and Wellington boots under her petticoats. All the different parts of this strange costume were in a state of complete decay, and the bonnet especially bore many marks, which might be those of blows. She was called Madge, had passed her fortieth year, and smoked a short pipe with an enormous bowl.

Her cavalier was no other than Little Snail, the brother of Consumptive Loo.

Although this strange party were not very brilliant, taking them altogether, their entrance caused a ferment in the Pipe and Pot. The landlady, Mrs. Green, a horrible old woman such as can only be found in London slums, and nowhere else, called her helper, and hurried to the table the new comers selected.

"Good evening, Mother Green," Snail said, with a patronising air. "Good evening, Red-top Sal; these here are my gal Madge, and my sister Loo, and that is my brother-in-law Mike. Bring gin and ale and all you've got in your dirty hole; I'm paymaster general this go."

"Very good, my little lord," said Mother Green, bowing to all in turn.

"I am not little," Snail shouted angrily, as he struck the crazy table with his weak fist. "I am taller than sister Loo, who is Mike's wife, and Mike is five foot ten. Spirits, I say."

Mrs. Green curtseyed again, smiled, and went to fetch the liquor.

"Are you thirsty, Loo?" Snail asked.

"Never know when I'm not," she answered. "Give me some baccy, Mike; I haven't a grain in my snuff-trap."

"Look ye, Mike," Snail went on, "I feel inclined to make your fortune, as you are sweet on my sister, to whom I act as father, for ours is a poor, useless, honest man."

"Don't speak of father in this company, Snail," Loo said, a cloud covering her brow. "He is a good man. Give me some baccy, Mike?"

"Good, Loo, good? Father is all right enough in his place; but we don't want church every day of the week, do we? Very well, then! As for Mike, I have a place for him in my bank.

Pretty Madge, here's the gin; a glass to your husband's health."

Madge took her pipe from her lips.

"My husband!" she repeated in amazement.

"What a fine voice little Madge has," Snail exclaimed, caressing the woman's bearded chin, "She might be called the Horse Guards bassoon. Why, ain't I as good as your husband, darling?"

"That's true," said Madge, returning her pipe to her mouth.

"And what employment have you got for me, little Snail?" Mike asked.

"I'll break your neck if you call me little, brother-in-law; that's understood. I wish to give you a situation. Can you bark, Mike?"

"Bark?"

"Yes, I can only miawl; listen!"

Snail suddenly put his head under the table, and a shrill, prolonged cat call could be heard. Madge jumped up, so perfect was the music. Mike looked under the table with the best faith in the world, which gave Loo a chance to empty his glass at one dram. That was not all. Mother Green and Red-headed Sal rushed into the bar, armed with brooms, to expel the cat that uttered such lamentable cries. Snail's triumph was complete.

"More spirits here, you old hag!" he squeaked; "keep your broom till you want it for a ride. My sister Loo is choking with thirst, and my darling Madge has a throat as dry as——, well, no matter what. Gin!"

"Give me some baccy, Mike," said Loo, whose head was already heavy with intoxication; "all ladies smoke now."

"You see I can miaw, brother-in-law," Snail exclaimed. "Can you bark?"

"Like a dog, is it? Well, I know the bawlers at the doors of mock auction shops is called barkers; but to bark like a dog is no trade," the big fellow said, with a contemptuous grin.

"Oh, isn't it? How much do you earn a day in the docks, Mike?"

"Three shillings, if I am took on. Every fool knows that."

"Three shillings. Good. And how much do you earn by the prigging?"

"Speak lower, you little villain."

'I am not little, you clumsy scoundrel. Well, what do you earn?"

"That depends, but not much."

"Give me some lush, Mike," said Loo.

"Not much," Snail went on, as he thrust his hand into his fob and drew out Edwardes and Co.'s gold pieces. "Well, that's what I earn, brother-in-law, without reckoning wind-falls."

"By miawing like a cat, is it?" Mike said, his big eyes expressing profound stupefaction.

"By miawing, brother-in-law, like a tom cat in March. There, pretty Madge, is a sovereign for you. Take it."

Madge took two without saying thank you.

"Is there none for me?" Loo asked.

"I stand your liquor, don't I? Well, Mike?"

"I wish I knew how to bark, Snail."

"You must l'arn. Then, Mike, instead of beating poor little Loo when she does not bring you at least a crown a night, you could give her a hot glass of grog, which would warm her."

There was a tinge of real feeling in Snail's words; but he soon went on in his boasting way.

"When you know how to bark, Mike, my influence will get you the place of Sawney. You remember Sawney, Loo's first love? Well, he died to-day by an accident."

"Dead!" Loo repeated, in a hoarse voice; "and there is no gin to drink him peace!"

"Gin, you old devil's dam; my sister Loo is melancholy, and she must moisten her poor throat. Is it a bargain, Mike?"

"All right. I'll take Sawney's place, and bark all you like."

The gin was brought, and the four drank and smoked for about a quarter of an hour longer. At the end of that time there was a movement in the street.

"The theayter's opening," Snail said, as he rose; "are you coming, Mike?"

"Up, Loo!" Mike shouted; "wake up, idle one, and let us go to work."

Loo opened her dead eyes, then closed them again, and laid her head on the table.

"I am afire inside," she muttered, as she pointed to her chest.

"Poor Loo," Snail said tenderly. "I'll give you two shillings to let her off working the pocket-diving to-night. Leave her

here. Mother Green, give pretty Madge and Loo as much as they want to drink, and the divil reward you."

Snail hurried out with Mike down Broad Court. The two brothers-in-law soon found themselves in front of the theatre, its doors just opening.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE PICKPOCKET AT WORK

When Snail and Mike got to the front of the theatre, the scene had completely changed its character. All the population of the taverns, all the groups just before scattered over Long Acre, Bow Street, and Great Russell Street were now assembled in front of the building. There was a pretended mob, one half of which did not represent real spectators. The rest was composed of thieves and policemen; the first "working," the others looking on with impertubable calmness.

It was a strange confusion and disorder, such as we could hardly imagine possible of existence in a civilised city. The thieves plied their avocation with admirable skill, but, above all, with miraculous coolness. Handkerchiefs changed pockets as if by enchantment. Purses fell from cut pockets into hands held out on purpose, and watches departed with safety chains, and even their keys.

At the moment when the doors are opened only the public enter a theatre, and several of the expectant pitites had some reason to remember the German performances for a long time, for six watches passed into the hands of the bold pickpockets. Snail, for his share, collared two, and employed them to maintain the friendship that existed between him and his pretty Madge.

But there were many other persons of our acquaintance present. A man is passing through the very thickest of the crowd. You might fancy him a lizard gliding through a quick-set hedge. Where on earth do all the objects disappear that he appropriates? Pocket-handkerchiefs, silk and cotton, watches, even coat-tails, which he cuts off without their owners suspecting it in the

least: all is fish to his net. He finds room for everything—his hands are constantly full, and as constantly empty.

An ill-tempered policeman catches him in the act Our man turns and gives him a most amiable smile.

"Delighted to meet you, Mr. Cuff," he says politely. "I trust Mrs. Cuff is in good health. I have been looking for you for a week past, to make you a trifling present for her birthday."

The policeman smiles in his turn, holds out his hand, and receives a sovereign, which disappears with a skill that announces that he had joined the force on the principle that one should set a thief to catch a thief.

"Good evening," our friend continues. "Kind respects to the missus."

He peacefully pursues his interrupted labours. He steals, he still steals. Once again we ask, who is this man, and in what gulfs does he hide the proceeds of his robbery?

Who could it be, dear reader, but our old friend, Bob Lantern, who has five pockets in his jacket, four in his trousers, three in his waistcoat, and we know not how many in his very shirt? Who but honest Bob, gaining a livelihood as best he can, and working for Temperance, the darling, whom so many lords would like to wed, and who measures five feet six in her stocking feet?

Living is very expensive, and Bob does not come across an operatic "draw" every day in the week.

Here and there are also some of our rioters in the office of Edwardes and Co.; but the majority, dressed in their Sunday clothes, and charming buxom Lesbias are drinking Mr. Smith's gold away in the neighbouring publics.

Nowhere will you discover the wide shoulders and lofty stature of the fair Temperance. She, perfect model of conjugal fidelity, does not mingle with the herd, but is respectably drinking alone an incredible quantity in the steaming atmosphere of her St. Giles's cellar. The virtuous wife drinks, that is her sole and innocent amusement. You would not obtain her favours for the price of a throne; yet, by the help of a bottle of Old Tom, you might introduce considerable trouble into Bob Lantern's household.

In the thickest of the crowd was conspicuous a tall, thin man, whose head soared a good four inches above the others. It was our old friend, Captain Paddy O'Chrane, who was giving himself a holiday this evening. He had imbibed sundry glasses prepared by Susannah's successor, and wore his best blue coat and his yellowest leather breeches. On his arm hung Mrs. Dorothy

Burnett herself. We cannot see her, because her plump red face is at least a foot beneath the surface of the crowd, but she is there, we affirm it on our honour, upon the arm of the worthy Captain, who has great difficulty in restraining ebullitions of her legitimate pride. They entered, but entered slowly, and the pickpockets were enabled to ply their vocation at their ease.

"Patience, my dear Mrs. Burnett, patience, Dorothy," said the good Captain; "in another quarter of an hour we shall be comfortably settled in the two places I took—belave me or not—at four shilling a head."

"Oh, Paddy—oh, Mr O'Chrane!" Mrs. Burnett gasped, "I am choking; I would give sixpence to have some air."

"How, in thunder, can you fale a want of that, Dorothy? The draft is whistling round my ears—ah, scoundrel, have I nailed ye?"

The last sentence was addressed to a person whose hand the Captain had just caught in his pocket. He held it tight, but could not turn, owing to the pressure of the crowd.

"Jintlemen," he said to his neighbours behind, "act like Englishmen, and apprehend that scoundrel, who does not know his trade—hang me if he does."

No one responded to this appeal, for in London crowds the maxim, "Each for himself," is applied with inflexible rigour.

"Dorothy," the Captain exclaimed, his wrist beginning to grow weak; "let go my arrm, confound you, and help me to catch this thafe o' the worruld."

Mrs. Burnett attempted to turn, and succeeded in snorting like a steam engine, that was all. The pickpocket, meanwhile, having exhausted the Captain's wrist by constant pressure, forced him to loosen his hold, and bolted. The Captain felt in his pockets.

"The scoundrel would not be choked off," he growled. "That rogue of a Bob is the only crature I know capable of sich 'tarnal impudence, and I wanted to spake to him. My love, he's stolen my rale silk handkerchief."

"Mr. O'Chrane," the landlady replied, "I am choked."

"Divil choke yer; that is to say, my love, I pity you sincerely. That handkerchief cost me half-a-crown in Field Lane. Ownly think of that, my dear?"

"Well, Mr. O'Chrane, I say that you are properly punished—all the handkerchiefs sold in Field Lane are stolen. If you were to buy your handkerchiefs of respectable tradesmen, as my cousin Mrs. Grubb, or——but I am choking."

Captain O'Chrane and his companion at this moment reached the last step. The punishment of the bloated landlady had come to an end. She would soon be able to change into that sickly air which, in a full theatre, rises from the pit and suffocates the gallery. The prospect relieved her beforehand, just as the sight of the shore stops sea-sickness.

On reaching the landing, Captain O'Chrane drew himself up to his full height, and looked loftily about the crowd below him. It was plain he did not see what he was looking for, for he growled and raised himself on tiptoe. Still, he did not appear to succeed.

"It is astounding, on my word," he muttered as he fell heavily on his heels; "astounding, by me faith! There is not one of the scoundrels in the crowd, and who better can I apply to if not to our dear boys?"

"I feel a little better, Mr. O'Chrane."

"Good, Dorothy, very good. I, too, feel another hand in my pocket, but 'pon me sowl! this one shall not escape me."

The Captain had, in fact, seized the hand of a second pickpocket and squeezed it as in a vice. A miawing in which there was both pain and irony was audible behind him, and almost at the same moment two sharp teeth were fixed in his fingers.

"Snail! You abominable tom cat," Paddy exclaimed, making convulsive efforts to turn round. "I'll be hanged if I don't twist your neck if you don't drop it."

"For shame, Captain, for shame!" Snail replied, after a final bite. "How ungentlemanly to come to a theatre without a nose-wiper. Stoop down, that I may tell you something."

"May I die if the cursed viper has not made the blood come," Paddy growled, for all that stooping, however. "What is it, imp?"

"I have to tell you, Captain—why, if that isn't Mrs. Burnett—you've a good taste. Mr. O'Chrane, I have to tell you—Good laws, how red Mrs. Burnett is, Captain."

"I am choking!" the poor landlady said mechanically, for a surge of the crowd had sent her back into a state of semi-apoplexy.

"She's choking, Captain," Snail repeated. "The proper way is to thump choking persons in the middle of the back."

Whereupon Snail heartily belaboured the landlady between her plump shoulders.

"Oh, Mr. O'Chrane, help!" she groaned, suffocated at once by want of air and by passion.

The crowd burst into a hearty laugh.

"There," said Snail, "the respectable lady is relieved, and owes me a pint at the very least. As for you, Captain," he added, in a whisper, "I have to tell you that there will be some fun to-night for sure."

"How do you know that, you young scamp?"

"I know it—oh, I know lots of things, Captain, and trust me there *will* be a lark to-night. All our friends are making love, and drinking in the flash kens of the Lane and Bow Street. Turnbull is bellowing in the gin-palace next door to the station-house: he is drinking to the memory of poor Sawney, who is dead. There has been a grand calling-out, and I'll bet Madge against Mrs. Burnett that we shall have some real fun to-night."

Paddy and the lady of his heart at this moment reached the check-taker.

"Very good, you gutter scrapings, very good," the Captain said between his teeth. "You may be right, and I'm a-thinking Mrs. Burnett would be better in her bar than here. However, she's of no consequence if I must give her the clean shake off."

"Good-bye for the present, Captain. I am not angry with you for having no han'ky. My respects to Mother Burnett."

"Where are you going like that?" Paddy asked.

"To the Pipe and Pot, Captain. If you want me, come there. You will find my wife Madge, my sister Loo, Mike, and more."

"Very good, Snail; take my blessin' backwards. Come, Dorothy, let us pass in."

Dorothy wished for nothing better. She let go the Captain's arm for a moment, and passed on. Paddy was about to follow, but it was fated that this night should be big with strange incidents for him. At the moment he was about to enter two heavy hands were laid on his shoulders, and a strange voice muttered these words in his ear:

"Don't turn to look. Business of the Lords of the Night."

Paddy stopped. The crowd, continuing to flock in, separated him from Mrs. Burnett.

"Do you know Lady B——?" the voice said.

"Yes."

"If she enters her box for the first act, go down to the vestibule immediately after the fall of the curtain. There a man will stop and speak to you. Do what he tells you."

"That's iligant."

"If she does not arrive for the first act, wait till the second; and if she does not come then, still wait."

"Yis; and what shall I have to do anyway, av you plase?"

The hands no longer pressed on Paddy's shoulders.

"No answer," he grumbled. "Now, I would give a shilling or two to see the face of this mysterious scamp, whom I respect, as is my duty. Always secret! I am not curious, but if I did not know that the Nobs of the Night were powerful enough to hang me, I would find means for seeing clearly in the darkness."

"Paddy O'Chrane!" a lamentable voice appealed.

"All right, Dolly, my love; but I must attend to business."

Good Paddy went in, not daring to turn his head to see the owner of the mysterious voice which had just whispered in his ear.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### CARRIAGE PEOPLE

Pit and amphitheatre had entered the opera-house. A fine cold rain was beginning to fall, and there was no one in the street but a few policemen. The pickpockets had withdrawn to the tap-rooms, where they were selling their plunder, either to each other, or to receivers whom the opportunity had naturally brought to the scene.

Bob Lantern sold the Captain's handkerchief for a shilling. Snail got three half-crowns for Mrs. Burnett's brooch, which he had dexterously appropriated during his conversation with Paddy; after which he returned to his station in front to wait for the arrival of the carriages.

Almost the first to arrive was Lady Champbell's; Miss Trevor and her aunt got out without any encumbrance, and mounted the steps leading to the vestibule.

"Go on, coachman."

"Take your turn, you scoundrel!" a soft voice shouted from another carriage. "My darling, I am speaking quite seriously; the scamp is capable of allowing that cab to shoot in before us."

The steps fell, and the door opened; the Viscount Lantures-Luces descended cautiously, and then held out his hand.

"Viscount, I am looking for my smelling bottle," a sharp voice said inside the carriage.

"I thought you would lose something! Ha! ha! neat, that!"

The Viscount leapt back into the carriage, and found the bottle.

"I am sure, Viscount, that you have laid my fan on one side."

The Viscount bounded back, and was so fortunate as to find the fan.

"Come, my fairest, give me your hand, pray."

"It's really terrible, Viscount," the feminine voice said petulantly, "but now I have dropped my handkerchief."

Lantures-Luces, with admirable patience, bounded a third time into the carriage, and placed the handkerchief in the hand of the lady inside. Misfortune had some advantage: had he not made this movement, his watch trinkets would have passed into the pocket of little Snail, who had actually laid hand on them in volunteering to open the door.

"My charmer," the Viscount said, getting up for the fourth time, "will you favour me with your hand now?"

"Get on there with that hearse and crowbait," the cab-driver shouted, who was waiting to "land" his customer. The latter, it appeared, was no less impatient than the driver, for he tore the whip from his hands, and dealt the Viscount's high-spirited horses a tremendous cut. They started off, and the coachman could not prevent them going three or four yards, which left the passage free. The lady began uttering piercing screams.

"What is the matter, my charmer?" Lantures-Luces exclaimed, "You are a brutal fellow, sir; I am speaking seriously. Here is my card," and he threw it into the cab. "Do not be perplexed, my darling; but be kind enough to give me your little hand."

This time the lady acceded to the little Frenchman's entreaty, placed her gloved hand in his, and, bounding on the step with a vigour that made the whole carriage shake, she flew two or three feet past the Viscount. A group of dandies assembled in the portico began to clap their hands, shouting—

"Bravo! bravo! la Briotta."

"Charming!" the Viscount muttered in surprise; "on my word of honour, a charming leap! I am speaking seriously."

Snail, changing his tactics, was gently feeling a silken cord that held the Viscount's glasses; they half issued from his pocket. During this the gentleman got out of the cab, and was quietly settling with the driver. The Briotta had taken a second unladylike leap, which carried her into the centre of the crowd of fashionables.

"Confound it!" said the Viscount, whose glasses Snail had succeeded in filching while he did not notice, being exclusively engaged with his divinity.

At the same moment, Snail, in possession of his booty, naturally wished to escape, but a policeman stopped his way. On the other hand, the gentleman from the cab was fairly advancing towards Lantures-Luces, doubtless to ask an explanation of his language.

The policeman, annoyed by Snail's dodges, who tried to pass first on one side, then on the other, let out with his staff. Snail avoided it with a squall, and it fell on the gentleman's shoulders.

"Dear me!" the policeman said stupidly.

The gentleman fell back a pace, buttoned his coat with a rapid movement, and raised his fists. The policeman seemed inclined to resist, but as the lamp of a carriage accidentally lighted up his adversary's face, he fled as if he had the devil at his heels.

"Why," Lantures-Luces exclaimed, "it's our dear Brian Lancaster. Ah, ah, gentlemen, did you ever see anything funnier? How the policeman runs! My dear boy, I wish I could box like you, in order to punish a fellow who just now lashed my horses at the risk of injuring our dear idol, Briotta."

"It was I," said Brian, carefully turning back his coat.

"We will say no more about it in that case, my dear fellow," the Viscount eagerly remarked. "Confound it. You are such a dear friend, that you may be allowed——"

"Good evening, Brian," said the Italian woman, as she left the group of dandies to bound towards Mr. Lancaster; "you are the only amusing companion in London."

"That is not flattering," the Viscount muttered; "on my honour, it is not."

"Have you come to see me dance?" she went on, offering Brian a powerful hand.

"I have come purely for pleasure, madam," Brian answered.

"That is not polite," the Viscount thought; "seriously, it is not."

The group of swells gave Brian a cordial greeting. The dancing donna, leaving the Viscount, who had brought her, hung on the arm of the new arrival, who drove about in a chance cab, but who appeared to occupy a splendid and enviable position in the fashionable world.

He was a man of about five-and-thirty, thin, but well-formed, above the average height, with square shoulders, which stooped a little forward. His features, which seemed carved by the sculptor's chisel, had the composed air of well-born Englishmen; but in the serious glance of his hazel eye there was an un-

measured boldness, almost like effrontery, and something coldly mocking, in direct opposition to the ordinary British expression.

His wide, lofty forehead greatly heightened the effect of the face, which was softened by soft, curling, light hair, which had never suffered the indignity of the hairdresser's tongs.

Brian Lancaster was far from being a handsome man; but many ladies declared him to be agreeable, which is better; and other women, more discreet, owing to their high social position, thought what the first said aloud. His face showed, at any rate, that he was a bold and energetic man, and he was too, in spite of his cold demeanour, impetuous in his way, and passionate; but only at intervals, and in gusts. He was also renowned for being fantastic.

Lantures-Luces, Brian, and the "mashers" entered the theatre together, the ballet principal proceeding round to the stage-door.

It was at this moment that the Countess of Lancewood's carriage drove up. The man who had spoken to Paddy, and who seemed to be watching for somebody else, hastily pencilled a few words on a leaf of his tablet, gave it with a shilling to one of the hangers about, and pointed out to him Rio Santo getting out of his carriage. The message reached its destination.

"The Princess of Longueville" and her aunt had arrived some few minutes before.

The first act was at an end, and Covent Garden Theatre presented a very brilliant sight on this evening. All the boxes, generally deserted or scantily occupied, glistened with magnificent dresses, and there were fashionable people even up to the amphitheatre.

We consider it indispensable to give some explanation of the position of our characters in the theatre. In the stage box on the left there was nobody. It was waiting for H.R.H the Duke of ——, whose property it was; the next box was occupied by Lady Champbell and her niece; the following by the Princess de Longueville and her aunt. On the other side of the theatre the stage box was occupied by the Countess and Rio Santo. Across the second a huge screen interrupted the view of the personages who might be present, while the third was occupied by ladies.

In the front boxes we should have recognised but few faces. We may, however, tell the reader at once that the pale, gloomy, wearied gentleman who seems to be so attentively regarding the ceiling of his box, and nothing else, is the Earl of Whitemanor, elder brother of Brian Lancaster, and master of virtuous Mr.

Paterson, the steward who does reprehensible business with Bob Lantern.

On the pit tier to the left, under the Royal Duke's box, was an immense one, formed by knocking down the partitions between three. In this Lantures-Luces was moving about among the "chappies" we met under the peristyle.

Lastly, in the upper boxes, excellent Captain O'Chrane, straight and stiff, raised his head a foot and a half above the pomaded bands of ruddy Mrs. Burnett, whose gaping dress, owing to Snail's theft of her brooch, threatened a display in terrifying exuberance. Paddy, while answering, in a way befitting a gallant and well-informed Irishman, the questions asked him by Mrs. Burnett about the opera and the actors, did not once take his eye off the ducal box. It remained empty, and the Captain believed for a while that he would have to spend the interlude in the pleasure of an intimate conversation with his beloved landlady.

But as the curtain fell, the door of the box was noisily opened, and Lady B—— made her entrance, covered with diamonds, under the cross fire of a hundred fashionable opera glasses fixed upon her.

Paddy uttered a profound sigh.

"My love," he said; "my swate Mrs. Burnett, would you not like a orange now?"

"Is there any here, Mr. O'Chrane?"

"I will go and git a penn'orth, madam."

The Captain hurriedly left his seat and his companion, stupefied by such unusual eagerness.

"He is a good sort of fellow, that O'Chrane," she thought; "but I would have preferred a drop of rum."

Paddy, instead of proceeding in search of the oranges, went straight to the lobby. He had not walked three paces in it ere a man, whom he did not know, barred his way and examined him from head to foot.

"Captain Paddy?" the stranger muttered, after making this examination.

Then he lightly touched his chest peculiarly with outstretched finger, saying—

"Lords of the Night's service."

Paddy bowed respectfully. The stranger led him on one side, and they conversed for about ten minutes.

"There are boys of 'the family' in all the publics round," the Captain then said; "I will find what you want."

"A tip-topper—no duffers will do,"

"An eel; don't fret."

The stranger laid a finger on his lip and withdrew. Paddy heard a second sigh.

"Mrs. Burnett would be better in her bar than here," he muttered; "but who shall I choose?—that muddy scoundrel Bob or that filthy crature Little Snail? Oh, an' which shall I choose?"

## CHAPTER XX.

### BETWEEN THE ACTS

On the fall of the curtain a general stir took place in the house, and at the same time a buzz rose on all sides. The pit began talking, the side-slips shouted and whistled, the boxes paid each other visits. In the whole house, perhaps, poor Mrs. Burnett alone was unable to communicate to any one the stunning impression scholarly German music produced on her. But she lived in hope, and thought that the gallant Captain would soon return with the golden fruit.

The noisiest box was, without any species of doubt, that which contained Lantures-Luces and the "Johnnies." From it could be heard each moment exclamations which strove to be witty, bad jokes, and extravagant offers of wagers. Lantures-Luces mixed but slightly in the conversation, for he felt the want of two things—la Briotta, whom he wished under his eye, and who constantly escaped him, and his eye-glass, the loss of which he felt painfully.

Rio Santo, who had gone to Lady Champbell's box, presently returned to the Countess. He leant carelessly on the back of her chair, and looked about the house.

"Surely I am not mistaken," he suddenly said, with an air of surprise; "that must be the Princess de Longueville."

"Who? Where?" the Countess asked.

"Over there, by the side of Miss ——, next to Lady Champbell. Will you allow me to go and pay my respects to her? I was on her visiting-list in Paris."

"How lovely she is!" Ophelia exclaimed involuntarily.

"She was considered the most beautiful woman in Paris—the

city where the greatest number of pretty women is met with, except this," Rio Santo answered, bowing as he withdrew.

The Countess looked after him for a moment, and then fixed her eyes again on Susannah. The latter was truly dazzling. She wore a dress of dark blue violet, which brought out the warm carnation of her shoulders and the exquisite outline of her bosom, on which a magnificent diamond brooch glistened. Her splendid black hair, trained by the hand of a skilful lady's maid, now fell in symmetrical masses.

And, moreover, all her former despair and apathy had disappeared, leaving no trace behind. This Galatea was living now. Round her queen-like brow there shone, as it were, a halo of enjoyment. How the luxury intoxicated Susannah, and what sweet delight she had derived from even the Wagnerian music! She had not yet noticed Lancaster, who was listening absently, just below her, to the poor jokes of the Viscount and the mad chatter of his friends, but she knew that she was about to see and speak with him.

How so? Susannah did not ask herself that. She could, if necessary, rival a diplomatist in perspecuity; but she could also behave blindly, like children do. This was, to some extent, the result of her nature, and, in a greater measure, of the strange school in which accident had thrown her childhood. We have still to tell Susannah's story.

The Countess could not take her eyes off her.

"How lovely she is," she muttered again.

Poor Ophelia referred everything to her sole thought—in every woman she saw a rival. The beauty of this stranger stabbed her to the heart, and aroused a sort of retrospective jealousy.

"He knows her," she thought, "and is eager to see her again."

The door of the Princess's box opened, and Rio Santo entered. Susannah gave him an indifferent glance, for he was not the man she expected. To this glance Rio Santo replied by one that was cold, piercing, and scrutinising. The lovely girl, accustomed to feel astonished at nothing, could not endure this intense glance, which seemed to pierce to the bottom of her heart. A weight hung on her eyelids, and they fell, through a feeling of unconquerable confusion.

She felt something like fear and respect in the presence of this man, whom she had never before seen, however, and whose name she did not know. At the moment she let her eyes fall, a cloud passed over Rio Santo's brow. He seemed to be searching among his numerous recollections—perhaps some distant resemblance struck him.

The old Frenchwoman, on the other hand, made fervent demonstrations. Rio Santo bowed to her in an off-hand way that formed a strange contrast to his usual politeness. Then he walked up to Susannah, who raised her large black eyes hurriedly, and kissed her hand.

"The Marquis de Rio Santo, my dear child," the Duchess de Gevres said, in the way of introduction.

Susannah bowed, and said in a low voice, "I have been told a good many things, sir. Some I remember, others I am trying to learn."

"I do not understand you, madam," Rio Santo interrupted her with a smile. "I merely came to talk with you about Paris. What news have you from France?"

"The Marquis knows nothing," the Duchess whispered in Susannah's ear.

"I fancied he was the master I have to serve," the lovely girl stammered, with a blush.

The Duchess made an energetic shake of the head, and Susannah lowered her eyes again; but not so quickly but a doubt could be read on her face. Rio Santo gazed on her for a moment longer.

"Madam," he then said to the Frenchwoman, whom he had drawn to the back of the box, "find some excuse for retiring at once. That girl must be alone when I return to this box."

This said, he bowed to Susannah, and went out.

The Dowager Duchess de Gevres was, perhaps, slightly offended by this sudden leave-taking, but did not show it at all.

"My dear child," she said, "I should have liked to remain with you, to guide and support you; but I feel seriously overtasked by the glare and excitement, and, at my age, prudence is necessary before German music. I am going to leave you alone. Susannah, remember my instructions thoroughly. Blindly obey every man—were he a street beggar—who utters in your ear the cue I told you. Do not forget that you come from France, and speak like the widow of Prince Philip de Longueville, my unhappy nephew. As for the Marquis, no indiscretion, I implore you. He is not one of us, and——"

"Madam," Susannah interrupted her, "shall I not soon see Mr. Lancaster?"

The Dowager Duchess began smiling.

"Patience, my darling, patience," she replied; "you will see him soon, and the interview will be long. Good bye, my dear

daughter. Have courage, and plenty of amusement with Mr. Lancaster."

The Frenchwoman wrapped herself up in her quilted sortie-de-bal, and left Susannah alone.

Rio Santo had returned to the Countess. He sat down by her side, and opened his mouth to speak; but, strangely enough, he hesitated, and seemed to be searching for words. Women who love guess. The Countess came to his help.

"Have you anything to ask me?"

"Yes," Rio Santo answered, his uneasiness being slightly diminished by this advance. "I have a favour to request, a service apparently slight, which, in any other country, would be a most simple thing; but with your severe English fashions——"

"Do you not know that I shall not refuse?"

Rio Santo seemed to have expected this answer, and yet it caused him a painful feeling.

"Certainly," he said; "I believe in your unbounded goodness. I would ask you an important service without hesitation; but these are trifles. I fancy I have delayed too long in explaining to you what I wish. The Princess de Longueville, by whose hospitality I profited largely in Paris, is here alone with her aunt, the Duchess de Gevres, whose ill-health foils her good-will. Stay; she is alone in her box, and I fear that the Duchess has been compelled to go home. I should be very pleased, Countess, if you would aid me in acquitting my debt of courtesy to the Princess. I would like the honour of presenting her to you——"

"Here!" Ophelia interrupted him.

"If you would kindly permit it."

"No, I cannot do that; the rules of society——"

"Do you refuse me?" Rio Santo asked reproachfully.

The Countess rose.

"Marquis," she said, "be good enough to give me your arm. In order to pay your debt properly, the stranger must be spared taking the first step. You can introduce me to the Princess de Longueville, and I can then have the honour of offering her a seat in my box."

Rio Santo kissed the Countess's hand in genuine gratitude, and the Countess felt herself amply repaid by the loving tenderness of his glance. A few minutes after, Rio Santo and the Countess entered Susannah's box. The latter rose, and, to the great surprise of the Marquis, who had lately seen her so timid and embarrassed, she did the honours with simple but perfect grace. She met the Countess's advances properly, and in a manner that sustained the old reputation of the French nobility.

If the Marquis had a serious and personal interest in opening the doors of British society to Susannah, he had full reason to feel satisfied. The result surpassed all calculation: two ladies, a Princess and a Countess, introduced to each other by a gentleman in London. It was an Herculean task, a miracle accomplished.

And now all was effected; the first step having been taken, there was no further obstacle. On the arm of the Countess of Lancewood, Susannah could enter any drawing-room, for she bore the title of Princess; and be everywhere successful, for she was the loveliest of the lovely. Susannah, the daughter of the Jew convict, could now treat the haughtiest aristocracy as her fellows.

Rio Santo took his leave when he had conducted the two ladies to Ophelia's box. Susannah sat down, and at once fifteen or twenty opera glasses were fixed upon her in the large box, and all sorts of exclamations could be heard, with offers to bet that she was not twenty—that she was an Italian—that she had more hair than la Briotta—that her brooch was worth a couple of thousand pounds, and so on.

Lantures-Luces would have liked to bet, and, above all, to speak, but he had lost his eye-glasses, and what was the Viscount without them?

"I know la Briotta's hair," he said, discreetly; "I speak seriously, and it is real and fine hair. I cannot see the lady, but if I could, I would lay any wager you please. But I have faith in dear Brian. Brian, my good fellow, give me your opinion about the fair stranger's hair. Look!"

Brian was in the shadow at the back of the box, where he was yawning energetically.

"Have any of you 'chappies' seen my brother?" he asked, instead of answering the Viscount's question.

"I have not my eye-glasses," the latter answered, "and these lorgnettes are so weak."

The other answered in the negative.

"Are you going to receive your allowance to-night, Lancaster?"

"I have come for that purpose, gentlemen."

He rose and walked to the front of the box.

"An admirable woman!" he said on perceiving Susannah.

"All right," the Viscount exclaimed: "Now I am ready to bet that she is ravishing. I place a blind confidence in our dear Brian."

"Good bye for the present, gentlemen," the latter said; "I am going to hunt up my brother."

"Poor old Earl," the dandy continued, when Lancaster had gone. "Were I in Lord Whitemanor's place, that rascal Brian would drive me mad."

"There would be reason for it."

"Brian plays him awful tricks," said another; "but he deserves them all."

Then the conversation turned to racing, Gaiety girls, ladies, Albert waistcoats, new champagne, and so on.

Susannah and the Countess remained alone. Ophelia had, certainly, reasons to feel prejudiced against the woman so suddenly forced upon her, whom Rio Santo had known and was so anxious to serve. But, from the first moment, she was strangely and irresistibly attracted to Susannah, and the two felt a tacit sympathy ere they had exchanged any other words than those used in formal introductions. They chatted on, therefore, without paying any notice to the excitement the whole house felt as to the stranger, or troubling themselves about the various exclamations that issued from "Fops' Alley." When Brian Lancaster leant forward to look at Susannah, the lovely girl saw him, and stopped in the middle of a sentence she had begun. Brian's look struck her to the heart. The Countess herself partly felt the shock, so sudden and violent was it; she noticed Susannah's pallor, and, curiously following her glance, saw Brian leaving "Fops' Alley."

"She loves that man," she thought.

That is the first, the sole suspicion that occurs to a female mind. The Countess maintained a discreet silence, and turned her head away, leaving her companion to yield freely to her emotions.

Susannah expected that Lancaster would enter this box, and it was, therefore, with a feeling of pain that she saw him opposite to her, seated by the side of Lady Champbell. She let her head droop, and became sad.

"He will come," a voice said in her ear, "and soon." Susannah turned. There was no one behind her, but the large screen that filled the next box was shaking, and Susannah fancied that she could see through the slits the insignificant face of Tyrrel, the blind man. She stooped down to see better, but the screen ceased shaking.

In the meanwhile good Captain O'Chrane, instead of buying the oranges he had promised the bloated and too credulous landlady of the Crown Arms, slowly walked down the grand stair-

case and reached the portico. As he descended he frequently scratched his right ear—a sure sign of embarrassment, and muttered a species of Jeremiad, in which the most contradictory epithets were mixed up. Incidentally, and in manner of punctuation, he begged Old Nick to be good enough to take him, as was his habit.

The Captain crossed Bow Street, and stopped at the corner of Broad Court.

"A 'cute divil," he muttered to himself; "faix, there's no difficulty in finding them at this hour round the Garden. I have known the time when I was as nate as here and there any one —but a dependable man, that is different. Now, that repulsive villain, my old friend Bob, would steal a chattering woman's tongue ere she had time to say Laws! that is the simple truth. But tell him to bring you the tongue, or anything he may have stolen, you might as well ask him to return my handkerchief."

The Captain shook his head sadly at the recollection.

"As for that pitiable reptile Snail, it is certainly impossible to find a more perverse or noxious animal. He will go far, I lay. But he is very young to work in public under the light of a gash. Who would have supposed that I could not take Mrs. Burnett to the theatre once in a way without all this happening to me?"

The Captain did not finish his sentence. He had evidently put an end to his irresolution, for he walked down Fore Lane with long strides, and pushed open the creaking door of the Pipe and Pot. The public had now a much more animated appearance than formerly, and Red-headed Sal ran clumsily from table to table, not knowing who to listen to.

Madge, with her pipe in her mouth and her hat one side on her head, was smoking, drinking, and saying nothing. Mike had his elbows on the table. His head was bare, and there was a bump on his temple, from which a drop of blood every now and then dripped on his shoulders.

Snail was drinking, miawing, insulting Peggy Green, kissing Madge's rough chin, and throwing the dregs of the glass in Sal's face. In a corner, Loo, stupefied by drink, was dancing and singing a heavy and monotonous tune. No one paid any attention to the girl, who, exhausted by her mad efforts, was panting and perspiring profusely. Scarlet spots shone on her livid cheeks.

From time to time she approached the table and begged for drink. Snail poured her out something, which she drank at a

draught, and then began shuffling again. In another corner, Bob Lantern, seated before a small piece of American cheese, was finishing a most frugal meal, which he washed down with common beer.

The entrance of so important a personage as the Captain, could not fail to create a sensation. Mother Green half rose through respect. Red-headed Sal broke a glass. Snail purred like an amorous tom-cat. Madge gave a sort of military salute. Loo asked for more drink, and Bob Lantern put away with marvellous rapidity, a certain showy handkerchief, with which he was about to blow his nose. Mike was the only one who did not stir.

"Good evening, Pegg," the Captain said; "good evening, my old friend; give me a rum hot. Sal, you are as black as a printer's towel."

He walked a few steps forward, and soon stood between Bob and Snail. His irresolution became worse than before.

"Good evening, Captain," said Snail.

"Very good, Mr. O'Chrane," Bob remarked, respectfully; "here's my respects to you."

"I'll take that wicked reptile of a Snail," Paddy muttered; "as for that odious Bob, I am afraid of him."

"Shall we have the honour of drinking with you, Captain?" Snail asked.

"Troth, yees will! You gaol bird, I'll drink with you, an fat Mike, the stupid lump, and with your pretty Madge, as you call her, although, as for beauty—but that does not concern me, —and even with Loo, poor girl! It can't be possible to drink in more abominable company. Here's your health all the same!"

"Here's your's, Mr. O'Chrane," Bob Lantern said in the background, as he swallowed a mouthful of his small beer.

"Thanks, thanks, Bob, old comrade: I need not say what I wish you, an' soon. Now, Snail, my young fri'nd, let us talk seriously if it be possible."

Snail burst out laughing.

"Do you hear him, pretty Madge?" he exclaimed; "Loo, do you hear him. Speak seriously on pay-day—on a night of fun! Nonsense, Captain."

"You will not repent it, Snail."

"I tell you, Captain," the lad said, who had swallowed more spirits than his head could stand, "I tell you I mean to amuse myself."

"Well, you spawn of a footpad, you shall amuse yourself, my son, afterwards."

"But you don't know that there has been a regular row in the public-house in Bow Street?"

"What do I care for that, you younger son of Satan?"

"Oh! what do you care? Look at my brother-in-law, Mike's ear. Loo is drunk, poor girl, or she would laugh heartily at it. Mike and Turnbull quarrelled and fought like brave fellows, but the 'bobbies' interfered, and they have settled to meet here this evening. There will be lots of fun, and I would not miss it, no —not for Madge's beard."

"But you wicked abortion?" the Captain said, indignantly, "but——"

"Listen," Snail interrupted him, after a sudden thought, "Mike is a good fellow, though he beats poor Loo too often. If I go with you, will you give Mike the place of Sawney, the barker?"

"Anything you like, you young rascal!"

"On your word?"

"On my word."

"Do you hear, Mike? Try and not be killed to night, brother-in-law. Come, Captain."

Loo, though exhausted and panting, was still dancing and singing. Paddy hastened to take Snail at his word, and both stumbled out into the Lane. Bob rose gently and followed them

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE SPY

CAPTAIN PADDY drew Snail into one of the dark corners which abound all along the muddy, gloomy, and narrow Lane. Before opening his mouth, he took care to inspect the vicinity minutely. As he saw no one, he began:

"My dear boy," he said, in a grave and dogmatic voice, "although it may be asserted that in you perversity has exceeded your years, and though you have a soul as black as the blackest hole in this accursed Lane, you have never yet performed any important duty. Catamiawing is not a trade," Paddy added; "you cannot, you ignorant scamp, mew and miaw all your life; you must secure a position. Would you like to earn a 'tenner' in a lump?"

"I don't care if I do, Captain."

"What! you earthworm, I said ten pounds. Think how many quarterns that will pay for, you little rogue, and how many ounces of tobacco you can buy, you dirty reptile, for pretty Madge, who is assuredly the most repulsive creature—but let us not dispute about beauty."

For a second, Snail had turned away his head, and was not listening. Had it not been so, he would doubtless have strongly protested against the Captain's improper allusions to Madge the lovely. Snail was no longer listening, because he was busily engaged in following the movements of a black and almost indistinct mass, which was crawling along the houses, coming from the Pipe and Pot. This mass advanced slowly, but with a continuous movement, towards the nook where the important interview was taking place.

"Well, you gallows bird," the Captain went on, "what do you answer?"

"It is Bob," Snail muttered; "that sneak is precious inquisitive."

"The lad is mad or drunk," Paddy thought. "Snail, my son, what do you mean by bringing up that hideous beggar, Bob Lantern?"

"He's bringing himself up," Snail answered.

"Where?" Paddy asked.

Snail pointed to the black mass still slowly advancing.

"That's Bob, is it?" the Captain muttered. "We may safely say that he resembles a sack o' coals, both by night and day. As for you, Snail, my boy, I do not know your equal. Hang me if I should have seen him, though I have passably good eyes; but them whitewashed cells is no cure for sore eyes. Let us speak low, and allow him to approach. I owe him something, so do not pretend to notice him," he said. "Little Snail, you are willing to earn ten pounds?"

"I would sooner have fifteen, Captain."

"Very good, fifteen, you young leech. I will not haggle, for I'm a gintleman. Your task is simple and easy. You will go to a second-hand shop and buy an evening dress. You will put your thin bones into it; you will enter the theatre, and sit down in the lobby. Do you understand?"

"Yes. Bob isn't more than thirty steps from us, though."

The Captain drew further back into his corner.

"Let him come up, my lad. In the lobby you will wait until a jintleman comes and touches your hand."

He touched the back of his fingers in a peculiar way.

"But," said Snail, "how will the gentleman recognise me?"

"Did I forgit that?" Paddy exclaimed. "I must be growing ould. You will hang in your button-hole a small piece of yellow ribbin."

"Very good—Bob is not more than twenty steps off."

"Let him come, my son. This jintleman will tell you what to do, and you will obey him. Stay, here are four pounds deposit for your dress, and five more, diabolical child, to give you courage. You shall have the rist afterwards."

"Good. Captain, Bob is not ten paces off."

"Oh! only tin paces, is it," Paddy grunted; "he's welkim!"

Suddenly changing his tone, he roared in a voice that could be heard from one end of the Lane to the other:

"It is the truth, Snail, by Jove, you young villain. The

sharpest coves are most easily tricked. See, for instance, that abject monster Bob. Well, Snail, my son, he is deceived, shamefully deceived, by Miss Timperance, to whom the poor devil is fondly attached."

Bob had stopped short. Snail laughed in his sleeve, and the Captain took a firmer grasp of his cane.

"May I be hanged," he went on, "if it is not a pity. Bob is a living disgrace, a walking pestilence; but he is an honourable pal, after all. And when we think that his blowen abandons him for that hulking bloke, Tom Turnbull——"

"Turnbull!" Bob gasped in his rage.

"Some one spoke," Paddy shouted, rushing from the corner. "Some one spoke; death an' fire, an' all the rist of thim! Who spoke? A shpy, is it, here, and listening?"

The Captain took his cane in both hands, and struck Bob as hard as he could, who ran away yelling, while Snail held his sides.

"That will teach him to steal a handkerchief of a pal," Paddy muttered triumphantly.

But his vengeance had gone further than he thought. Bob did not feel the blows of the cane, for he was wounded in the heart. Before venturing back into the Pipe and Pot, he leant tottering against the wall, and convulsively squeezed his chest with both hands.

"Temperance!" he said. "Ah! Temperance and Turnbull."

He clenched his fists, and made a menacing gesture.

"Oh! Turnbull, eh!" he repeated. "I'll Tom him."

When he returned to the public-house, he sat down despairingly by Mike's side.

Captain Paddy, well pleased with the success of his trick, left Snail, and returned to the theatre. But he forgot to buy the oranges, and Mrs. Burnett never forgave him that breach of gallantry. Snail went off too buy his dress as a gentleman.

At the moment when we re-enter the theatre in the footsteps of the Captain, the second act of the opera had just finished, and the visits were re-commencing. The door of each box occupied by ladies opened every minute, and offered shelter to gentlemen who wished to pay their respects.

The Countess of Lancewood thus received in succession Lantures-Luces, who considered it his duty to assure Susannah that she had a delicious fan, and that he meant the remark quite seriously, the Cavalero Angelo Bembo, Sir Paul Winterfield, Dr.

Muller, Major Bloxam, and many others. Susannah behaved as if her childhood had passed under the fashionable tutoresses by whom the children of the nobility are taught deportment. She said little, because she was sad, but she spoke well, and the Countess became more and more delighted with her. Perhaps it was the charm of the French language which Susannah habitually used, and spoke like a born Parisian.

Towards the middle of the act, Lancaster left Lady Champbell's box. Susannah's heart began beating quickly, and as she waited, she counted each step he had to take in the circular corridor. She felt him coming. The delay lasted a moment, and then a slight sound was heard at the box door.

"Here he is," the mysterious voice whispered in Susannah's ear; "be happy, but be prudent."

The door opened, and Lancaster entered. He bowed respectfully to the Countess, and requested an introduction to the Princess. While he conversed with the Countess, Susannah regarded him eagerly—not from under her eyelashes, or from the side, as girls are accustomed to do—but with head erect, and without any attempt to hide the powerful attraction that drew her to him. The visitor, perhaps, noticed it; but he pretended not to perceive it.

"You were not at the Trevors' ball last night," the Countess said.

"No, madam," answered the gentleman. "In spite of the attraction of a grand ball given out of the season, I had my business to attend to in killing the entire evening selling cigar-lights at my brother's door."

This was said in a most simple tone, and in perfect seriousness. The Countess could not refrain from smiling.

"Poor Earl," she said; "you are pitiless to him, sir. But I suppose you did not sell matches all night?"

"No, madam, only till eleven o'clock. At that hour a slight incident occurred, which I shall be delighted to tell your Ladyship. I was quietly hovering round his door, crying my matches aloud, like the watchmen in 'The Watch Cry' at the Lyceum, you know, when my brother's steward, a low fellow of the name of Paterson, ordered me to be off. Of course, I asked him if he wanted a penny or a halfpenny box. In reply, the villain set a groom on me, who gave me a cut with a cane."

"Is that true, sir?" the Countess exclaimed.

Susannah blushed.

"As I have the honour of telling your Ladyship," Mr. Lancaster continued; "the hardest cut of all."

"And what did you do?"

"Unfortunately, I am not rich; I took out my pocket-book, and was only able to give the groom a paltry five pound note."

"Five pounds for a beating, sir?"

"I would have gladly paid a hundred pounds, madam, had my means permitted it. He obeyed orders so faithfully—good servant. The breed's dying out. Oh! my brother must have spent a pitiable night. I had some friends near to act as witnesses, and I got a summons from the magistrate. There will be a public investigation and scandal. A brother struck by his brother's servant! I shall insist on my counsel making the audience drop scalding tears, and he has something to work upon, has he not? But be kind enough to tell me whether you have seen Lord Whitemanor in the theatre?"

"If I had done so, I would assuredly not tell you, for I really pity the poor Lord."

"Thanks, madam," Brian said, with a slight emphasis; "it is something when the weaker party can divert the world's pity from himself and crush his adversary beneath it."

Brian Lancaster rose as he said this; his eye sparkled, and there was about his whole person a stern energy that formed a striking contrast with the frivolous tone of his story.

Susannah had understood but little of the conversation. Taking all Lancaster had said literally, she fancied him unhappy. Her heart boiled with indignation at the thought of the outrage undergone by the man whom she placed above all other men. She wished to console and lay her love like a balm upon the wound she saw bleeding in his mind. His visit seemed ended, and Susannah was afraid, for he was about to retire as he had come, and be no more to her than he had previously been; and when would she see him again?

The box door opened, and a visitor entered. Lancaster, who had bowed to the Countess and taken a step towards the door, suddenly altered his mind, and sat down without ceremony by Susannah's side. As the Countess was now talking with the new comer, they were left quite to themselves.

Lancaster waited some seconds ere he spoke. He bent on Susannah a strange, fixed, and earnest glance. The girl trembled beneath this glance, which had subdued and enslaved her vigorous nature. A world of confused thoughts crowded to her brain, and her heart swelled in her bosom.

"You are very lovely, madam," the Honourable at length said,

in a grave and sad voice; "I had better not have seen you."

He stopped and took Susannah's hand, which she did not withdraw.

"I do not fear ridicule," he continued; "and if I have been deceived in order that I may be laughed at afterwards, what matter? Your pardon will suffice me, which I implore beforehand. I have been told that you detest me, madam."

"It is not true," Susannah answered. "In brief, the reverse."

Brian Lancaster seemed stunned by the unexpected reply. His eyes fell involuntarily. When he raised them again tears were slowly running down the lovely girl's pale cheek.

"You love me?" he repeated, in an altered voice. "Alas! young lady, do you know me? Have you heard of my racketty life? I do not love you—I will not love you, for it would be cruelty, perfidy, cowardice."

Susannah looked at him, and a smile illumined her face.

"You will love me," she said; "oh, yes, you will love me. I feel it, I know it! Your voice tells me so in spite of your words!"

He did not reply at once. He revelled for a moment in the contemplation of this admirable creature, whom he might make his own by one word. He drank in long draughts of the passion that flashed from Susannah's half-closed eyes. He was conquered.

"Yes, I shall love you," he at length said, in a low and deep voice. "I will give you all of my time that I can, madam. Many sensible persons believe me mad, because madness is in our family, and I do not know what to think myself at times. Wait! He uttered this word in a deep tone. His eye, which had hitherto been passionately fixed on Susannah's lovely face, flashed a glance full of bitterness and anger towards the centre of the circle. He had just seen, in a middle box, the sleepy and wearied face of his brother, the Earl of Whitemanor.

"Madam," he continued, making an effort to resume his mask of coldness, "if you still love me in ten minutes hence, then I will love you my whole life."

He rose and hurried away, leaving Susannah stupefied. Lady Lancewood—the charming woman—did not seem to notice this incident, but gave her entire attention to the finale of the second act.

Mr. Lancaster descended the stairs four at a time, and only stopped when he reached the street.

"Johnny!" he shouted.

The cab that brought him was standing a short distance off, and the driver got down.

"My box and jacket, Johnny," Brian continued, as he took off his elegant black coat while walking towards the cab.

Johnny produced from the vehicle a waiter's round jacket and a white apron. Brian Lancaster donned the jacket, tied on the apron, put under his arm a flat, square box, and bounded up the steps again.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A HIGHLY ECCENTRIC GENTLEMAN

BRIAN LANCASTER, younger son of the late Hugh, Earl of Whitemanor, found himself at an early age in a false and almost intolerable situation, which is the fate of nearly all younger sons of the English nobility unless they enter the Church. Brought up in the midst of almost regal opulence, he suddenly found himself, on his father's death, reduced to a wretched position.

His brother inherited both the peerage and, owing to the law of entail, almost all the patrimony, while Brian, on the contrary, descended to a condition verging on poverty.

Brian had hitherto led a careless, headstrong life. The future had not occupied his thoughts, and he refused compliance with the wishes of his family, who proposed to push him on in the Church.

Brian possessed noble feelings and a singular strength of will. When his father died, it was not too late for him to enter holy orders; but he refused again. He continued to live an idle life, but he was no longer careless.

As one of the Princes of London fashion and a very influential member of the aristocratic clubs, he did not disclaim against the law of entail, because the anger of the true Saxon is not revealed in empty words; but he concentrated his hatred, and thought of the means for declaring a war to the knife against this law, which plundered him—an English war, patient, legal, and implacable.

In the meanwhile he devoured his little property very gallantly, and more and more ensured his position as a man of fashion, adding to his other qualities a deep tinge of eccentricity. Brian, in his youth, performed some notable feats. Most of his exploits

have been attributed to others; but enough remained for his glory, and pupils of his in "sprees" ever spoke of him with respect.

Thus, only to quote one instance, it was Brian who gave the first occasion for a practical joke which has since gone the round of books of facetiæ.

The H ourable Gustavus Grubb, M.P., wore enormous King of Sardinia moustachios, which had the misfortune to displease Brian Lancaster. One morning he went to his club and declared his formal intention of making the aforesaid moustachios disappear. The Honourable Gustavus Grubb was told of this in the evening, and provided himself with a revolver with the intention of dying in the defence of his moustachios. On the morrow a personal advertisement announced that the Hon. Brian Lancaster would cut off the moustachios of the Hon. Gustavus Grubb, M.P.

The latter added a sword stick to his pistol.

On the next day posters six feet high could be seen all over London, promising a reward of one hundred guineas to any one who brought to the house of Mr. Lancaster the moustachios of the Hon. Gustavus Grubb, M.P.

Gustavus put on a coat of mail under his clothes.

Finally, *Punch* related that several gentlemen who wore heavy moustachios would be massacred in the bosom of their families by bandits desirous of gaining the promised hundred guineas.

Gustavus reflected, sent for a barber, and forwarded his moustachios to Brian with an invitation to go over to Belgium. The latter carried away his right ear with a pistol bullet in the salt marshes of Blankenberg.

We might fill volumes with similar tricks performed by Brian Lancaster, all admirable in their invention and burlesque gravity. Unluckily, we have something else to tell the reader.

As may be supposed, such jokes were expensive to Brian, who only too soon came to the end of his fortune. An accident hastened his utter ruin; his brother, the rich Earl of Whitemanor, or rather, his steward, Mr. Paterson, brought a law-suit against Brian, which the poor player of pranks lost through want of funds to defend it.

The two brothers had never been on very affectionate terms, and since the death of the late Earl, Brian, who regarded himself as despoiled, had felt rancorous against his elder brother. The law-suit brought matters to a crisis, and Brian swore that he would carry on a deadly struggle against the Earl. He kept his word. The weapons he used were strange; but he wielded

them terribly, and struck without relaxation, so that a wound was made, and, once made, bled on without the possibility of closing it.

The Earl then bitterly repented having driven to extremities the man whom the favour of the world rendered powerful, and who, without passing certain bounds, and as if in sport, threw bitterness over his life; but it was too late. The Earl reflected. He offered a small pension, then a large one, and, lastly, thousands of pounds. Brian insisted on one half of his immense fortune, and the Earl refused.

The war continued—a marvellous war of the weak against the strong, in which the weak had all the advantage—a war in which one of the combatants, armed with a pin, pinked and pricked incessantly a powerful adversary reduced to a state of impotence. The Earl became the most unhappy man in the three kingdoms. Brian, pitiless in his daily attacks, still went on striking, sought weak points in the man whom he had himself paralysed, and tried to drive in to the head the pin which in vain attacked the obdurate skin.

And, strange to say, in this struggle his allies were those whom nature and the laws ought to have rendered his enemies. They were the young lords, the heirs to peerages, people who, some day or another, would find themselves in the same position to their younger brothers as the Earl now stood to his terrible persecutor, who only saw the amusing side of Mr. Lancaster's conduct; they did not understand that each of his attacks was a blow dealt at the law of entail.

The more striking and strange the blows Brian dealt in this duel were, the more loudly the fashionable world applauded. The entire West End quivered with delight when they read in the Society papers such paragraphs as these:—

"The other day the Earl of W——, having taken a row on the Thames, recognised in one of the watermen his brother, the Honourable B—— L——. We live in very strange times, and the decadence of Noble England may be marked by such incidents," &c., &c.

Or, again:—

"On the cold and damp evening of Sunday last, a few passers by recognised, lying on the steps of the house of the Earl of W——, the Honourable B—— L——, his Lordship's brother. It is said—and we are compelled to believe it, as the witnesses are people entirely worthy of credit—that his Lordship had his unhappy brother driven away by his hall porter."

And everybody laughed heartily, because everybody was in the secret of the farce. The only person who did not laugh was Brian himself, who performed his task with all seriousness.

It was very curious. The powerful Lord dared not show himself in any drawing-room. He timidly carried his weariness to spots where he hoped not to meet his torturer, but Brian seemed to have a body of spies at his orders. Wherever the Earl might hide himself, he ever found on his road the cold and mocking face of Brian. The latter, on the contrary, became more and more a celebrity. This prolonged duel appeared to all good judges an eccentricity of the first water. He was asked to every party, and would have been the lion of the season had not Rio Santo stepped in to wear the crown.

The curtain had fallen for the second time, when Lancaster entered the theatre in the dress of a waiter. He had opened his box, and carried it in front of him, supported by a ribbon. He first walked round the orchestra stalls, to the horror of the refreshment keeper's harpies, thus shunted by an amateur.

"Gentlemen," he said, "pray buy my bonbons, and offer them to your ladies. This is a French fashion."

Very few purchased. It was not the custom, and in London nothing is permitted which has not happened two or three times before. When Brian arrived before Fops' Alley, he was greeted with noisy shouts—enthusiastic applause. Brian repeated his "patter" very seriously. Everyone wished to buy sugar plums, and the eccentric gentleman's box would have been emptied in a twinkling had he not closed it with the words:—

"Enough, gentlemen, enough; I must have some left for up there."

While saying this, he raised his eyes to the box where the Earl of Whitemanor had sat motionless and fagged since the beginning of the opera. The Earl was not in the least affected, and did not seem to expect the gathering storm.

"I assure you, my dear fellow," exclaimed Lantures-Luces, 'that the idea is exquisite in the highest degree, on my honour. The fact is, that in Paris people do sell sweetmeats to the audience. I am speaking seriously. But how the deuce shall I manage to see you when you are up there?"

Lancaster was a long way off ere the little Frenchman had done chattering, He went up stairs and offered his confectionery from box to box. Everywhere he was greeted with bursts of laughter, and the ladies considered the act exquisite. So soon as he had passed, the people could be seen leaning out of the boxes and following him with a curious and encouraging glance,

so that, when he arrived in the front of the Earl of Whitemanor's box, four or five hundred opera glasses were fixed on the two brothers.

The people waited with joyous impatience. In truth, this interlude did great injury to the piece, and Wagner's masterpiece suffered.

"My dear Dorothy, my darling!" said Captain O'Chrane to Mrs. Burnett, who had not yet shaken off her ill temper, "the divil take me if all those lords and ladies know what they are about! They are looking as they would at a wild beast at that attindant in a white apron who is selling lollipops."

"They look at what they please, I suppose, Mr. O'Chrane," the savage landlady replied; "and you can see that the lords are buying sweets for the ladies. Everyone is not like you, thank Heaven, Mr. O'Chrane, who don't get your lady even a liquor!"

"That will do, Dorothy—that will do; you are, madam, one of the——"

"What am I, Mr. O'Chrane?"

The Captain muttered half a bushel of curses, but did not dare tell Mrs. Burnett what he thought of her.

Lancaster had stopped in front of the Earl of Whitemanor's box. He stood for some minutes motionless, thinking that his mere presence would attract his brother's attention; but he was out of his reckoning. His Lordship, plunged into a drowsiness, was turned away from the stage and glaring fixedly at the opposite box. Brian, weary of waiting, raised his box and tapped it gently against the front.

The Earl of Whitemanor turned his eyes impatiently. When they fell on Brian, he quivered from head to foot as if he had received an electric shock. His face turned green, his dull eyes were lit up, and his lip began trembling, though without producing any sound. The entire audience was hushed.

"My Lord and brother," Brian said, in a clear and earnest voice, which penetrated to the most distant corner of the most remote box, "buy some sugar-plums of your father's son, so that he may be enabled to buy a penny loaf."

Fops' Alley applauded. The pit, though not knowing why, applauded too; the amphitheatre, imitating the pit, shouted Bravo! and Paddy himself, in the innocence of his soul, uttered an approving "Good for yees!" The boxes in which there were ladies were less noisy; but more than one pretty face concealed itself behind a fan to smile, and Lady Champbell declared that Mr. Lancaster was a marvellously amusing fellow. Lord White-

manor, meanwhile, the object of all this insulting curiosity, remained as if struck by lightning.

"Well, my noble brother," the implacable Brian said.

The Earl opened his mouth as if to speak, and silence was restored as if by enchantment. The only thing audible was Lantures-Luces' shrill voice saying—

"I assure you, on my honour, gentlemen, that I would give a fivaw to have my glasses. I am speaking seriously. I can see nothing at all."

The Earl, incapable of uttering a word, had given his brother a furious glance, and, by a final effort, drew the curtains of his box. He was no longer visible. At the same moment a tremendous roar broke out in the house. A fresh crowd rushed tumultuously on to the already seated spectators. They swore, and fought, and seized every unoccupied seat. It was "half price." Lancaster was enabled to escape amid this plebeian disturbance. Johnny took back the sugar-plum box, and gave in exchange the fashionable coat.

While this was being done a strange scene took place in the theatre. At the moment when the half price tumult was beginning to calm, a cry of distress and terror was heard from the stage-box in which Lady B—— was awaiting alone the coming of her illustrious protector. All eyes, that had previously been turned to enjoy the confusion of Lord Whitemanor, were now directed to this side of the theatre.

Lady B—— was seen to rush impetuously into the corridor, crying for help, and almost immediately there could be seen in the front of the box the dull face of Tyrrel, the Dark Man, whom society knew by the name of Sir Edward Mackenzie.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE DARK BOX

SNAIL did matters conscientiously. He laid out his five pounds in Holywell Street, and emerged, dressed as a gentleman from head to foot. Nothing was wanting—neither patent leather boots, nor primrose kid gloves.

Before entering the theatre, he returned to Broad Court, and hid his clothes, of which he made a bundle, in the very nook where the interview with Captain Paddy O'Chrane had taken place. He felt a great inclination to display himself in all his new splendour to the amazed customers of the Pipe and Pot, whose windows gleamed fifty yards off; but he managed to resist the temptation, and proceeded to Covent Garden.

It was towards the end of the second act. There was no one in the corridor but half-a-dozen of those persons who only appear in the house between the acts, and fly when the curtain rises. Snail began walking up and down, puffing out his chest to the best of his ability, and chewing a toothpick which he had bought to heighten his claim to the character of a gentleman.

He looked at everybody he passed; he coughed, hemmed and hawed, but all in vain—no one paid any attention to him. And yet he had put in his button-hole a piece of yellow ribbon resembling no known decoration. Were people poking fun at him? Snail was beginning to fear so. He bitterly regretted the hard benches of the Pipe and Pot, the bearded chin of lovely Madge, and even the stupid look of his brother-in-law Mike.

He was growing tired, and could not even miaw to pass the time away—that was allowable only on the stage of an opera house. In his despair he went up to the refreshment counter and asked for a mug of ale. They had no ale in pewter; but an

ice was handed him. Snail had never eaten such a thing. We fancy his dissatisfaction would have been expressed in a manner eminently disagreeable to the nymph of the bar had not a gentleman come up to cause a diversion. This gentleman laid his hand on Snail's chest at the very spot where the marvellous yellow ribbon glistened.

"Follow me," he said, in a low voice.

"What! follow you?" Snail replied, drawing up his short carcase haughtily; "blow me, but you've got a cheek!"

The gentleman frowned, but Snail was not to be frightened by a trifle.

"Follow you?" he repeated; "I only follow people I know, and I don't know you from St. Pathrick, as my worthy friend, Captain O'Chrane, would say."

The new comer looked at him for a moment with a smile.

"This is a determined little scamp," he muttered.

Then suddenly seizing his hand, he made a cross with his forefinger on the palm, and added:

"For the Lords of the Night!"

"Very good," Snail said with an air of importance; "you now talk sense. But you might know, sir, that, being entrusted with a duty of the utmost confidence, I could not listen to the first humbug who would say, 'Follow me.'"

"That is true. What is your name?"

"Snail—what's yours?"

"Mine? That is of little consequence, my young friend, Snail, and time's precious. Come with me."

Both left at the moment when the crowd poured out of the theatre with the fall of the drop scene. They had some difficulty in making their way through the suddenly crowded passages, and stopped close to the box in which the Countess of Lancewood and the Princess de Longueville were seated. The gentleman gave three double knocks at the door of the next box. It opened, and Snail, suddenly thrust forward by the shoulders, found himself in utter darkness.

The place was evidently a box, but was so hermetically closed, that no beams from the hundreds of gas lights burning in the house could penetrate it.

A deep silence prevailed for a moment, during which Snail only heard the suppressed breathing of several persons. He began trembling.

"I can feel you are trembling, child of the family," a dull, disguised voice said to him; "if you are a coward, hook it!"

"Hang it, sir," Snail replied; "I am a man. Still, I like to see straight before me. What have I to do?"

"Hold your tongue."

At this moment Snail felt his arm seized, and he was dragged to the front of the box. A hand touched the screen, in the middle of which a luminous point at once appeared.

"Put your eye to that hole," he was told.

Snail obeyed. His eye, accustomed to the gloom of the box, was dazzled by the light that burst from the gaselier and the footlights. The man who had spoken seemed to understand this, and waited a few minutes ere he spoke again.

"Look across the house at the stage box opposite—what do you see?"

"A lady in a satin gown, and with scrumptious sparkles blazing all over her."

"Do you see her hand?"

"I can see one."

"Which one?"

"Wait a moment—her right hand? no, it's her left hand leaning on the edge of the box. Oh, by George, what fine rings! and how pleased my pretty Madge would be to have two or three like that."

"Silence! We will say it is the left hand; on the middle finger of that hand you must see a ring that glistens more than the rest?"

"Yes, sir, yes; it looks like a bit of the sun itself."

"Move on one side."

The hole was closed, and Snail found himself once more in deep gloom.

"The left hand and the middle finger," the man repeated, squeezing his arm tightly—"you will remember that?"

"Yes."

"Now come here."

He was pushed to the right side of the box. The screen was slightly raised, and a bright ray lit up the box; but two hands had seized Snail's ears, so that he could not turn to look at his companion.

"Look down," the voice said again, but this time in a whisper; 'what do you see there?"

"A woman's shoulders! the finest shoulders——"

"Silence! Can you not see her face?"

"No."

Snail's head was held motionless until he said: "I see her face, sir. Why, I have seen it somewhere before."

"Silence!"

The screen was let fall again, Snail's ears were let go, and he began shaking himself like a poodle.

"Where have I seen that beauty?" he asked himself. Then, suddenly calling it to mind, he added:

"What a fool I am! She resembles Susannah, the barmaid at the Crown Arms. I must point her out to the Captain, to make him laugh."

"Go out now," the voice said at this moment; "turn towards the door and do not look behind you."

The door of the box opened, and Snail was pushed out as he had been pushed in. Even if he had wished to infringe his instructions, it would have been impossible, for he was thrust out quickly. He found himself again in the lobby by the side of the gentleman who had accosted him down stairs. The light restored all his impudence.

"Hello!" he said, "I am your very humble servant; but that is a strange way of passing one's time. Those honest gentlemen in there need only have gone down to their coal cellars instead of coming to the play, they would have seen quite as much. I am not satisfied with their conduct, and I should like to have seen their faces."

"Peace, boy, peace."

"I am a man, sir. My wife Madge and my brother Mike will tell you so. One word, if you please. Is his Honour in that dark cell?"

"Whom do you call his Honour?"

"The master in Finch Lane—the nob who pays—Mr. Edwardes."

"He is not there."

"Oh!" said Snail, "then I am not sorry there was no light. I always like to see his Honour."

"Some have seen him against his wish, young man," the gentleman said, in a stern, slow voice; "but they will not tell about it."

"Has their mouth been stopped?"

The gentleman gave a nod.

"With yellow-boys?" Snail continued.

The other drew from his breast a small, narrow-bladed dagger of admirable workmanship.

"No, not with gold—steel!" he said.

Snail became silent, and followed with a timid look the hand of the gentleman as he slipped the little dagger behind his satin waistcoat.

"Now," the latter continued, "you remember all you have seen."

"Perfectly, sir. Opposite, a lady, a hand, and a ring; on this side, another lady, and her shoulders—splendid shoulders, sir!"

"Listen to me."

The stranger took him by the hand, and spoke to him for about ten minutes, repeating the same phrases several times, like a schoolmaster striving to drive something into a boy's thick head.

"Very good, sir, very good," Snail at length said impatiently; "if you give it us once more, I shall understand nothing. It's all right—settled; let me at 'um."

"Take care," the gentleman interrupted, who had not, perhaps, the same confidence in Snail as Snail had in himself, "it is no trifle."

"If it is a matter of five hundred pounds—and no ring can be worth that—I shall work it to rights."

Snail and his comrade walked round the lobby towards the box occupied by Lady B——. A man, who silently left the mysterious box, followed them at a distance of about twenty paces. It was Tyrrel, the blind man. He left in the box four persons, who eagerly surveyed the Duke of X——'s box from four holes made in the screen.

From the other side of the theatre nothing of all this could be suspected. The screen showed itself but very slightly, and nearly at the spot where the curtains opened. Still, this hermetically closed box had for a moment aroused the doubts of the chief police inspector on duty, and he put on a "special" to watch it.

It was just at the period when Mr. Lancaster was attracting the attention of the whole house. Snail and his companion were then on the right of the house, behind the box in which Lady B—— sat alone.

"Attention," Snail's guide whispered; then, at the moment when the half-price tumult reached its height, he added, "Go in and win!"

He disappeared. Tyrrel took his place, Snail rapped boldly at the door of the Duke of X——'s box, holding a letter in his hand.

"His Royal Highness sent me," he said, with a respectful bow, "to deliver this note to you Ladyship."

He held out the letter, and Lady B—— stretched forth her hand to take it. But at the moment when her fingers rested on

the paper, Snail seized them violently, and with extraordinary coolness strove to pull the ring over her middle finger.

Lady B——, terrified by this strange attack, could not at first find her voice to give an alarm. When she prepared to do so, Snail had stepped through the door with the ring in his hand. Lady B—— rushed madly after him, but at the door ran into the arms of Tyrrel, the blind man, or, more correctly speaking, the unfortunate Sir Edward Mackenzie.

"Let me pass, sir," she shrieked. "Thieves! thieves!"

The poor blind gentleman, in truth, did his best to make way; but there was a fatality. He and Lady B—— behaved exactly like two over-polite gentlemen who meet in the street, and both step to the same side to make room for the other. Each time that Lady B—— dashed to the right, Sir Edward imitated her; each time she went to the left, this gentleman, so worthy of pity, was in her way.

"It is not mine," she panted like a mad-woman; "His Royal Highness lent it to me. It is a crown diamond, good Heavens, and worth twenty thousand pounds! Stop thief! Help!"

At length, finding strength in her desperation, she seized Sir Edward Mackenzie's arm, and drew him violently into the box, and then rushed frenziedly along the lobby. Sir Edward, who, poor man, had not seen or understood anything, laid his hand on the front of the box and looked out with unintelligent eyes. They were fixed, doubtless by accident, on the shut-up box, and he gave an almost imperceptible nod. The screen was half lowered.

Snail, however, profiting by the delay, had quietly walked round the lobby. No one as yet thought of pursuing him. He entered the Countess of Lancewood's box, the door of which was open. The Countess was leaning out, and trying to discover whence the shrieks she could hear came.

Susannah, on the contrary, was looking pensively at the spot Brian had just left in front of the Earl of Whitemanor's box. Snail touched the satiny skin of her shoulder, and said in a whisper—

"Lady of the Night!"

The girl started up.

"I beg your pardon," Snail said with a smile. "Put this away safe! It is a deposit sent you by the Nobs of the Night."

Susannah took what Snail offered her, and he at once disappeared. It was at this moment that Lady B—— succeeded in freeing herself from Tyrrel and rushed along the lobby. The whole house was soon in an uproar. All the police inside and

outside the theatre were busy. They searched and temporarily laid hands on a number of honest people. Then a sudden inspiration struck the Inspector: he tapped his forehead and said—

"I have it!"

Poor Lady B—— regained a little hope. The Inspector, followed by a squad of policemen, hurried to the mysterious box in which Snail had received his instructions, and drew up his men on either side of the door.

"They may be stout fellows," he said; "are you ready for a fight?"

"Yes, sir," the policemen answered, closing up so as not to leave room for a mouse to pass.

"Stand fast!" the Inspector said again.

At the same moment he opened the box door, but no one came out. The policemen held themselves in readiness to attack the first person who appeared, but no one did so. Yet the box, in spite of the opening of the door, was still dark enough to conceal somebody. The Inspector, who was a man of courage, entered and pulled down the screen.

Floods of light entered the box: it was perfectly empty!

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE BALLET

THE excitement passed from the fashionable part of the house to the upper boxes and galleries. Everybody talked about Lady B——, His Royal Highness, and the crown diamond.

"Twenty thousand pounds!" fat Mrs. Burnett said in the meanwhile; "Oh, Mr. O'Chrane, twenty thousand pounds!"

"No more and no less, Dorothy, my darling, as it appears: divil take me but it is a fine stroke of business for the swell mob."

"A fine stroke, sir! It is a theft that deserves a rope at least."

"Of course, Dorothy, of course—a rope, as you say."

"This is a day of robberies," exclaimed the little Frenchman, Lantures-Luces, as he burst into Lady Champbell's box; "will your Ladyship permit me? On my honour, and I am speaking seriously, a more exquisite fan is not to be found throughout London."

"Has the robber been caught, Viscount?" Lady Champbell asked.

"The robber? Pray are you alluding to my robber, or to Lady B——'s? To my eye-glasses, or to her ring?"

"Why, Viscount, it is said that the ring is worth twenty thousand pounds."

"Madam, His Royal Highness is rich, and I am only a poor gentleman. My glasses cost me four louis at Chevalier's. But that is not the worst news of the day. I am speaking quite seriously, and I know something that will interest you more. Oh! here is the dear Marquis: I did not recognise you; how are you, my dear fellow?"

"You alarm me," said Lady Champbell; "what news are you referring to?"

"I forgot—but you are probably aware of it, as the dear Marquis—— No? Well, I snall have the honour of informing you. It is about poor dear Mr. Percival, madam."

Since the beginning of the performance, or, indeed, since the ball of the past night, Miss Trevor had been plunged into a species of apathy which rendered her miserable. During the whole of the evening she had maintained a gloomy silence, and the presence of Rio Santo had this time been powerless to enliven her.

Lady Champbell fancied she had headache, and paid her all possible attention, which Mary did not seem to heed. An observer, acquainted with all that had been going on for some months past at Trevor House, would not have been of the same opinion as Lady Champbell. He would have guessed that, on this evening, if not before, too heavy a weight was pressing on the heart of this poor child—a weight which must crush her unless it were at once removed. He would have guessed that a silent suffering was undermining the pale maiden, whose gentle will could not repulse the poison offered her as a remedy.

Now, the Marquis de Rio Santo was an observer not of the common stamp. Moreover, he knew better than anyone what had been going on at Trevor House for some months past; hence he discerned all that we have just said, and knew the nature of this concealed suffering. He knew that the crushing weight under which Mary's heart groaned was uncertainty, doubt, darkness, which others had carefully piled up around her.

He knew that, if left to herself for a single day, she would have rushed whither the true voice of her soul summoned her—that voice which had been stifled and falsified, which was now silent about the beloved name, while uttering by force another name learned in tears; and he knew that this day would not, could not come—that Lady Champbell was watching like an attentive sentry, and that the illusion, even if it might prove deadly, would be carefully kept up without relaxation or pity.

Did he, then, love Miss Trevor passionately enough to become the accomplice of Lady Champbell's blind cruelty? Was his love of the nature of those which overthrow all obstacles and trample on everything in order to attain the object? No. His love was real; but when compared to the other feeling that possessed him, it was but secondary.

It was, consequently, not love alone that impelled him towards Mary Trevor. Love had had its moment—its day. He had

adored her one evening at a ball, and he would probably have possessed her as he had done so many other women had not a more serious and elevated thought crossed his fancy. He wished to make Miss Trevor his wife, and he respected her. And if he had the force thus to master his desires, generally so commanding, we may judge whether he would allow himself to be thwarted by a maiden's irresolution.

When Lantures-Luces uttered the name of Frank Percival, the little Frenchman was astonished at the effect he produced. Rio Santo started like a couching lion suddenly stung by a wasp. Lady Champbell forgot her smile in a frown, while Miss Trevor suddenly raised her drooping head and fixed an inquiring glance on the Viscount. Lantures-Luces was not accustomed to such a success, so he stopped in order to be pressed a little more.

"Well, sir?" Miss Trevor asked, "well?"

Rio Santo left his seat behind the young lady, and glided up to Lantures-Luces.

"I am speaking seriously," the latter said; "it is a very sad affair."

"In Heaven's name, sir," Mary began, in pitiable distress.

"Will you not speak?" Lady Champbell asked drily.

"Certainly, madam. Poor Frank has fought a duel."

"A duel?" Mary repeated, with a gasp. "In London? Never!"

"Pardon me, yes; and was wounded."

"Slightly, sir, I suppose?" Lady Champbell interrupted, with a nod, imperatively commanding an affirmative reply.

"I beg your pardon," the Viscount answered, "it is dangerously, madam, dangerously."

"Frank—wounded," Mary murmured feebly, as she laid her hand on her pallid forehead and closed her eyes.

"As for the name of his opponent," the Viscount went on. He stopped suddenly: the Marquis had violently squeezed his arm.

"Very good, my dear fellow, I understand," he went on; "but do not squeeze so hard; my discretion is well known, I should think—and, besides, I do not know the name of the man who wounded our poor Frank."

Lady Champbell and Rio Santo exchanged a glance: on one side it was a question, on the other a confession. Miss Trevor let her hand slowly fall by her side, and re-opened her eyes.

"Did he not say that Mr. Percival was wounded?" she asked. "Dangerously wounded! Good Heavens!"

Lady Champbell had to take her hand, but Mary swayed in

her chair, and fell down senseless. Lantures-Luces retired to narrate this incident to the swells, and also to have a closer look at la Briotta, who had just come on the stage.

"Poor girl," Lady Champbell said, as she placed her salts to her niece's discoloured nostrils. "Oh! what have you done?"

"He insulted me, and is my rival."

"An unhappy rival; for this fainting fit only proves that Mary remembers the companion of her childhood. Poor Frank! I, too, feel heartbroken. Pray call my carriage; Mary is regaining her senses."

"Only one word, madam," the Marquis said, in a suppliant voice. "Have I lost your favour by doing what every gentleman would have done in my place?"

"I do not know—I do not know; and if poor Mary did not love you, I think——Oh! she is recovering, sir."

Rio Santo kissed Lady Champbell's hand, and walked rapidly to the entrance of the theatre.

"All must be finished to-morrow," he murmured. "This event will hurry the result on; and, at all risks, I will be Miss Trevor's husband."

"Poor Frank," Lady Champbell repeated, in the interim; "he must be very unhappy. I tremble when I think that the Marquis might have been wounded. What a frightful blow it would have been for the poor child!"

Signora Briotta reaped an incalculable number of bouquets and bravos. The upper boxes, silent, or nearly so, during the opera, threatened to break down under the enthusiasm of the audience.

In Fops' Alley, little Lantures-Luces was behaving like a madman. He threw wreaths and bouquets on the stage, cried "bravo!" "delicious!" and "well done!" and while thus engaged he found means to talk immoderately.

Susannah and the Countess of Lancewood were alone in the latter's box, for the visits were at an end. The Countess kindly talked of Lancaster, so Susannah hung with delight on her every word. When the Countess ceased speaking, Susannah thanked her simply, thus divulging her love in a word, as if ignorant that love is a thing which, in this world, must be hidden. The Countess took her hand with a smile.

"I should like to be your friend," Susannah said.

"I am yours," the Countess answered; "when you are as happy as you are this evening, come to me; the sight of your happiness will console me; and when you suffer, come also, for suffering is reduced one-half when two have to share it."

Susannah looked at her in surprise.

"You, so brilliant, so lovely!" she murmured; "you speak of suffering!"

"May Heaven preserve you, madam," Ophelia said as she tried to smile. "You are more brilliant and more lovely from learning that nobility and beauty are powerless to protect us against certain pangs."

Susannah gently pressed the Countess's hand.

"I never loved but you and him," she thought aloud; "those who possess a sister are happy."

They parted uuder the portico of the theatre.

"La Princesse de Longueville, your Highness's carriage," a footman in brilliant livery shouted.

Susannah had almost forgotten her noble name. The Countess bade her good-bye to go into her own carriage. Susannah bounded into hers, and was scarce in it ere a man's hand closed the door.

"Princess," Tyrrel, the blind man, who was seated by her side, said at the same moment, "there is a long distance between here and the Thames, I think? Hand me the article entrusted to you."

Susannah, without answering, drew from her bosom the ring, still wrapped in paper, and handed it to the blind man.

"That will do," he said; "to morrow you will have work to do. You will have to nurse a sick man and kiss the brow of a person who is not the Honourable Brian; but he is an Honourable too, and Percival is equal to Lancaster in the Herald's College."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE SISTERS

ABOUT the same hour the Earl of Whitemanor reached his mansion. He descended from his carriage without saying a word, slowly walked in, and shut himself up in his library. He was paler than death, and his eye had the vague, undecided expression of men threatened with madness. He fell into a chair, threw down his hat, and buried his face in his hands.

There was something strange and striking in the emotion of this man, generally so cold, so thoroughly armed against all assaults, so completely wrapped up in his egotism, The defect in his coat of mail was found out: the poisoned dagger was buried to the hilt in his heart, where a pitiless hand turned it round and round incessantly.

The Earl suffered horribly. He suffered the more because his wound was one of those which, through their smallness and imperceptible nature, escape ordinary remedies. His enemy, a species of impalpable phantom, could not be grasped. His blows, so cleverly dealt, summoned neither the vengeance of the law, nor the contempt of the world. On the contrary, each time that he dealt a blow society smiled and applauded.

The Earl still heard in his ears the hateful buzzing of the laughter of the audience. He fancied he could still see the outraging smile of the men, and the more odious efforts of the ladies to maintain their seriousness. The insolent fans behind which they had hidden themselves to mock him still flashed before his dazzled eyes.

And there was no mode of striking in his turn, of repaying blow for blow, and wound for wound!

He was like the bear in the fable, bearing under his thick skin

the stinging dart of the bee. He writhed, he roared, but it was of no avail.

The Earl of Whitemanor was a man of about fifty years of age. His face bore some distant resemblance to his brother's, but the expression was very different. On it could be traced apathy mingled with those choleric symptoms which are marked by age on the faces of men of sanguine temperament. Passion, brutal and unbridled passion, must once have burnt in these now sunken eyes. The disgust and weariness that follow satiety could be plainly traced; but amid this weariness, which many regarded as an imaginary evil, there was real suffering; rage combated apathy, and weariness was effaced under the sting of agony.

He had been for a long time one of the most dissolute men in London. A demagogue had branded him with the title of hippopotamus, and never had a tribune struck more justly or truly. The Earl, in fact, only had the odious, heavy, material side of vice. His conquests were effected by the aid of gold and of those villanies whose name at once sullies the pen that records it and the eye that reads it. He coldly wallowed in clandestine orgies, and had not even the conventional excuse of pleasure, for he bore everywhere with him his weariness, and did evil phlegmatically.

Such a man was necessarily inaccessible to remorse. He was full of bile; and he was miserable because the cause of it was real. He became stupefied, without hope of cure, without strength to fight, and was only aroused from time to time by some sharp attack that touched him to the quick. After passing ten minutes in a state of complete immobility, the Earl suddenly rose. His face, formerly so pale, was now of an apoplectic redness. He rang so violently, that the rope remained in his hands.

"Paterson, the villain!" he said to the footman who came in; 'send him here at once."

"Mister Brian's at it again," the footman thought, as he rushed to the steward's room.

The latter had a light heart and a calm conscience at this moment. His afternoon had been employed as was proper—for his master's good. He had lost no time, but made some excuse to call on Mrs. MacNab—people like Mr. Paterson are never hard up for an excuse—and had seen Anna Macfarlane.

He was dazzled by her beauty; she was meet for the gods, and Bob had told the truth. This gentle maid, so charming, pure, and angelic, would have allured Satan himself, supposing that potentate had begun to feel weary of life.

Paterson, therefore, went down eagerly, and presented himself before his master with a smiling face. The Earl was still standing; his mouth was open, his eye fixed, and his pallor had returned. He allowed Paterson to walk close up to him, and the steward bowed most respectfully. Unfortunately, he did not take the trouble to examine his master's face, or he would have read on it the storm that awaited him, written in legible characters.

"I am very glad, your Lordship," he began. The poor wretch did not conclude his sentence. A violent blow was dealt him by his Lordship's fist, and he was hurled to the other end of the room, where he fell all of a heap. The Earl had in former days practised with some success the noble art of boxing, and now applied it. Paterson rose choking.

"It is you," the Earl said; "you are the cause of this, villain. Who prompted you, you vagabond, to send out grooms to an Earl's brother? He revenges himself on me."

The Earl fell back in his chair again.

"But, my lord," Paterson humbly tried to say.

"Silence, by Heaven! treacherous servant that you are!" the Earl of Whitemanor shouted. "Begone at once; I will not have you sleep in the house. To-morrow remove what belongs to you and what you have robbed me of. You shall not sleep under my roof again."

The Earl rested his heavy head in his hand. "You will egg him on to kill me," he muttered, in a hollow voice, "for he will do so. Begone."

Gilbert Paterson did not dare resist this peremptory order. He scarce took the time to put on an overcoat, and precipitately left the house. There was a cold and damp fog. Paterson wandered about the streets haphazard, absorbed in his recent expulsion, and unable to direct his attention to anything else.

"The kick-out," he muttered. "Got the kick-out at the very moment I was working my utmost for him. Oh! in one way or another you shall pay me for it. But does he fancy that a man-of-business leaves a house in this way, with a few paltry thousands in his private account nobby? I wanted five years more to make my fortune honourably—five years. Devil, you have robbed me of five years, worth at least ten thousand pounds. I cannot conscientiously make you a present of that."

Without knowing it, he had traversed a large portion of the West End, and was now walking, with many gesticulations and talking to himself, along High Holborn.

"Expelled!" he repeated; "and this Minotaur will not furnish

me with the means to recover my loss. Come, I must be calm. We have passed through more difficult straits. Let me see how to amend my book."

He continued his walk along Holborn and Cheapside, and at length entered Cornhill. He had taken a long walk, and without reasoning, and merely yielding to an imperious want of rest, he leant against a post at the corner of Finch Lane.

On the other side of Cornhill, opposite Mr. Falkstone's house, a light could be seen glistening through the window curtains of the second floor. It was Mrs. MacNab's house, and the light shone in the bed-room occupied by the two daughters of Angus Macfarlane.

It was nearly midnight. Clara was asleep, with her lovely head resting on her supple white arm, which the excitement of a dream had caused to emerge from the blankets, in spite of the cold. She breathed irregularly, and at times a sigh escaped from her half-parted lips.

Anna was seated by her side, and had not yet blown out the night lamp. She had not sought shelter from the cold under the protection of her blankets. Her eyes sparkled, and displayed no sign of sleep, although generally she was sound asleep at this hour.

The reason was, that MacNab had not returned to his mother's house all day. Nothing had been heard of him; it was now midnight, and Anna knew not what to think. She looked from time to time at her sister, as if envying her sleep, or wishing to arouse her to talk, and not remain alone under the heavy burden that crushed her.

Clara still slept. While sleeping she murmured incoherent words; and when the light of the lamp fell on her face, drops of perspiration could be seen to bead, and then dry on the burning skin of her forehead.

"Poor sister!" Anna thought; "she has been suffering thus for many nights; but, good Heaven, will he not return? Oh, I trust he will soon!"

A sharp knock at the front door was heard. Anna started from her chair, and ran out on to the landing. Trembling with the cold, and ashamed at her eagerness, she bent over the banisters to hear and see. Mrs. MacNab soon appeared on the staircase. She was also awake, for the love of a mother does not go to sleep more than the tenderness of a lover. She received her son at the moment when a servant opened the door, and overwhelmed him with caresses and questions.

The Scot was very sad. Anna could only see him for an in-

stant as he ascended the first flight, but that was enough. She was at once reassured and grieved; reassured in her little jealousy, but grieved at her cousin's sadness. She listened, but he had entered his mother's room, and all that Anna could hear was the name of Frank Percival uttered with sad emotion and exclamations of surprise by Mrs. MacNab. The girl shivered in her thin night clothing, but remained at her post. The interview lasted but a short time. MacNab soon re-appeared on the staircase, and instead of going to his bed-room as usual, returned to the street door.

"Where is he going?" Anna asked herself.

She received no response to the question. She even heard nothing, except a name MacNab uttered as he embraced his mother. That name was Clara's.

Anna felt a tear weighing down her eyelashes.

"Clara," she repeated sorrowfully, "and not I!"

The street door closed again, and Mrs. MacNab came up-stairs, murmuring—

"Poor young gentleman! Stephen is a good and generous lad. Poor young Mr. Frank!"

Anna re-entered her room, and closed the door after her. She had a heavy weight on her heart. Clara was still asleep, and at the moment Anna was getting into bed her sister started violently in her sleep. She tried to speak, but the nightmare closed her lips.

"Clara, Clara!" Anna said.

This friendly voice broke the charm.

"Oh, Stephen, Stephen," Clara murmured, "save me!"

Anna hid her face in her hands, and copious tears trickled between her fingers.

"She too!" she murmured.

Then she roused her sister with a kiss. Clara started up in affright, and then threw her arms round Anna's neck, who assumed a faint smile.

"It is you. Oh, thanks! I was dreaming. How I love you, Anna; and how sweet it is to see you on awaking. It was a terrible dream, sister."

She broke off, and added, with a sigh—

"Terrible, and yet sweet. He was here. He enfolded me in his arms. I could not resist—he carried me off."

"Who?" Anna asked, her eyebrows meeting. "Stephen?"

Clara shook her head.

"No," she answered. "Stephen tried to protect me against him."

"Against whom?" Anna asked again.

"I do not know," Clara said, after looking at her fixedly for a moment. "What was I saying? I spoke as people do in a dream."

"You were speaking of Stephen, sister."

"Yes, it is true—it is he, Anna."

She drew her sister to her heart, and covered her forehead with kisses.

"I have guessed your secret," she continued—"you love him—all the better! Our father's last letter announces his speedy arrival. We shall soon see him—perhaps to-morrow. I will speak to him, Anna; and you shall be happy."

"Then you do not love him?" Anna asked, smiling through her tears.

"I? I love nobody, Anna," Clara replied—"no one, you understand. Whom should I love?"

"I believed——"

"How cold you are, sister! Come into bed again at once. Poor Anna! how glad I shall be to see you the wife of your cousin, who is so noble and good. I only wish our father were already in London."

The sisters embraced once more, and Anna returned to her couch. In a few moments her regular and soft breathing could be heard, while it was Clara's turn to remain awake. She watched through this night as she had done through so many others, when a dream did not quell the fever of her burning thoughts.

Gilbert Paterson, in the meantime, had found time to reflect, but had hit on nothing suitable; and he remained for nearly half-an-hour at his post, cold, ill-humoured, and not knowing what to decide on. It was the noise of the door being shut by MacNab that at length aroused him from his reverie. He shook his limbs, which were stiffened by the night damp.

"Where the deuce am I? I cannot pass the night in the street. Let me have a look."

He looked about, and recognised Cornhill. Then his eyes, raised by accident, noticed the light still burning on Mrs. Mac Nab's second floor. This sight seemed suddenly to dispel the gloom of his brain. He smote his forehead, and smiled joyously.

"By Jove," he said, "this is my affair. I will try it on my own venture to-morrow. As for the means, I am acquainted with several; but what is the use of running any risk? I have money to pay others for that."

He went up Cheapside, and got into a cab at St. Paul's Chain.

"Where to?" cabby asked.

Paterson remained for a moment undecided.

"To Bow Street," he at length said.

Then he added to himself—

"It will go rough if I do not find what I want among Peggy's customers."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE TAP ROOM

NEVER, never had Bob Lantern been so actively engaged with a matter that did not concern him. Worthy Captain O'Chrane's blows seemed to have imparted extraordinary activity to him; and when Snail, on returning from his expedition, re-entered the Pipe and Pot, Bob was working his hardest to clear the tap, in order, as he said, to afford pleasure to his friend, honest Mike.

Honest Mike, for his part, did not appear animated by a very lively feeling of gratitude. His elbows were still resting on the table, and his head was between his two hands. His bruises had swollen—the blue veins stood out under the curls of his thick red hair. Bob broke off his task now and then, in which he was aided by two or three vagabonds, to come and sit down by Mike's side.

"Drink a little, my lad," he said; "but don't drink over much. When a man is full, he makes a row, but does little work. I have seen you hit hard blows in your time; but you have a tough customer to deal with to-night. Drink up, my honest Mike. Tom Turnbull is a brute who hits blindly, and if you let yourself be hit on the temple, it was because you had been lushing, old boy."

"Tom won't turn up," Mike answered, involuntarily expressing a hope; "he is a coward."

"He is a coward, Mike, a thorough coward; but he will come. I'll go and fetch him if he don't—hang me if I don't—if only through my friendship for you, Mike, my boy."

Any one who had watched Bob's face while he was whispering these encouraging words in Mike's ear would have recoiled with

disgust and terror. The perspiration stood under his harsh hair; his eyes sparkled cunningly under his descending eyebrows. A periodical convulsion agitated the muscles of his face, and at either corner of his mouth there was a foam, which he constantly wiped away, but which as continually re-appeared.

The entire expression of his face denoted with energetic hideousness the instinct of ferocious cruelty, at once terrible and timid, which was the foundation of his character, and was generally veiled by the insatiable and victorious appetite that incessantly impelled him to plunder. The mask of simplicity which at times covered his face in the delight of satiated greed, or through the necessity of deceiving, was violently rent asunder, and displayed in its nudity the frightful character of his countenance, on which all the evil inclinations that can corrupt a man's heart had in turn left their stigma.

For two hours Bob had been busied in trying to heat Mike's stagnant blood; breathing without relaxation the spirit of anger and discord, and preaching, mocking, and praying in turn. For during the past two hours a furious hate had been boiling within him against Tom Turnbull; and he did not himself dare meet him face to face, for Tom frightened him, and who does not know that fear adds gall to hate?

When he left Mike his champion for a moment, it was to prepare the tap-room, which he thought a place admirably well adapted for the coming fight. It was large and level, and the fight, if it took place there, could hardly fail in having a sanguinary result.

Snail had resumed his normal dress, and carried under his arm his evening costume, done up in a parcel for getting his deposit back; he had borrowed, not bought. He seated himself by the old spot, opposite Mike, and by the side of Madge. He had been away two hours, during which Madge had not stirred; she had not even opened her mouth, except to drink every now and then; her short pipe was still between her lips, and neither tobacco, gin, nor rum had produced the slightest effect upon her.

On the other hand, poor little Loo, crushed by intoxication and fatigue, had fallen motionless in the middle of her extravagant dance. She could be seen lying in the corner where she had been frisking. Her thin limbs stood out under her gown, which was stained with beer and perspiration. Her open mouth breathed with difficulty, and at each breath produced a hoarse sound, frightful to hear. Her head was thrown back, and her splendid auburn hair—the sole relic of a beauty polluted in the bud—lay

scattered over the ground around her; her hollow cheeks had two red spots, and her half-closed eyelids displayed the tarnished enamel of her large eyes.

She was asleep. Bob gave Snail a rancorous look, and rose to go and help in cleaning out the tap.

"Hilloh!" Snail shouted, "is everybody asleep here? My pretty Madge does not even wish a fellow good evening; Mike, my brother-in-law, looks like an ox ready for slaughter; that old hypocrite of a Bob looks at me and goes off; and Loo—where the deuce is Loo, pretty Madge?"

Madge silently pointed to the corner where lay the poor girl

"You are a great scoundrel, Mike," said Snail, "to leave your wife like that. What does Loo want? A little spirits, I expect, and she will be as jolly as you and I."

He walked round the table, and approached his sister.

"Poor Loo!—she's burning like a lump of coke! She will choke like that, with her head downwards. Loo! Loo!"

He shook her, and the girl half raised herself, but fell back again

'Loo! Loo!" Snail repeated, trying to raise her.

Loo put her hands on her panting chest.

'Oh! oh!" she said in a hollow voice, "I'm on fire."

'Your glass, Madge," Snail cried.

Madge passed her glass full of rum to Snail, who put it to his sister's lips. The latter drank it at a draught. She then opened her eyes, rose, and began laughing.

"Hooray—I'm game agin!" she said; "I've had a snooze. Who'll have a dance?"

The rum momentarily appeased her sufferings, and the poor girl fancied herself cured. She tried to rouse up Mike, who growled and repulsed her roughly. Then she caught hold of pretty Madge, who might very fairly have passed for a man; after which she went off to jig by herself in a corner.

The glass of rum had revived her intoxication. Her long hair fell in confusion over her face; and she laughed and grimaced behind this veil like the child she was. And it was a thing to contract the heart painfully to see this precocious victim of vice thus shake off her agony, and find in intoxication the strength she needed to exhaust her last breath.

"Heads up, Mike, my boy," said Bob, who had sat down again by the side of the lighterman; "I hear a noise in the court—they are coming."

Mike drew himself up, and seemed to listen attentively.

His dull eye sunk again, as if through a sudden start of terror.

"Here they are!—here they are!" Snail shouted. "Mike, get up like a good boy. They'll think you are funkey. Madge, is he not funking?"

"No, no, Snail; Mike is a brave fellow—aren't you, Mike?"

It was Bob who said this, and while speaking he furtively examined the lighterman's terrified face.

"He does tremble like a leaf," he growled; "and yet that villain of a Tom must have his account squared. Oh, Temperance! Temperance!"

Bob gnashed his teeth, and convulsively clenched his fists.

"I say, good Mother Green," he asked in a whisper, "have you put what I ordered on to mull?"

"I mixed a quartern of Jamaiky, Mr. Bob, two of gin, a quarter of a pint of French brandy, half an ounce of cinnamon, and a glass of sherry."

"That ought to do. Is it hot?"

"Biling, Master Bob. I will bring it in."

The landlady disappeared for a second, and then returned with a bowl, whose steam caused her to cough somewhat excessively on the road.

"Come, Mike, a go of punch, my son," Bob shouted joyously; "that will give you heart, my lad. I know, of course, that you don't want for that; but a man never has too much."

Bob poured out the burning mixture for the company. Mike swallowed his glass at a draught. Madge emulated him; but Snail sipped his rummer out, and declared this new sort of grog detestable.

"The fact is," said Madge, profiting by the moment during which she had removed the pipe from her lips; "the fact is, it is weak."

"Another, Mike," Bob continued. Mike drank a second dose. As he finished, a violent kick sent the door in.

"Didn't I tell you they were coming?" Snail shouted. "Here they are—now the sport will begin."

While speaking he sprang up. Bob poured out a third tumbler for Mike, who, in his trouble, emptied it to the last drop. Bob looked at him hard. Mike's sluggish face became gradually animated—his eyelids quivered, and the veins in his forehead swelled. On seeing this, Bob took up the half-filled bowl and broke it on the floor.

"He has had enough," he muttered; "and Turnbull must not taste it."

Snail, in the meanwhile, had rushed towards the new comers. They were Tom Turnbull, Fat Charley, Mitchell, and two or three others of Captain Paddy's pirates. All were drunk, but Turnbull was a little more so than the rest. They came in singing, and covered Peg Green with curses in the guise of welcome. Room was found for them at a table.

"I'm here," Snail said to them, "with my wife Madge, mateys; but I cannot offer you a drink, because Mike is my brother-in-law, and drinks with me. Are we now going to begin the game?"

"Oh! Mike is your brother-in-law," Turnbull remarked; "all right, I am going to smash him all the same!"

Bob had followed Snail very gently. He gave Tom Turnbull a hearty squeeze of the hand.

"Come, come, Tommy," he said, "Mike is a good lad, and is going to become our mate. Can't the affair be settled?"

Tom, in spite of his drunkenness, looked at Bob suspiciously.

"Since you try to smoothe me down," he said, with a gloomy air, "there will be a skull smashed to-night, perhaps two. What do you want to shove your oar in for, eh?"

"I wish to make you friends, old comrade," Bob continued, putting a fresh dose of honey in his voice.

"Be off. I've got my backers and bottle holders."

Bob rejoined Mike. The latter was no longer the same man—his robust frame was erect, and there was a savage fire in his glance. Bob's infernal grog was producing its effect.

"My boy," Bob remarked, "that bully Tom will listen to nothing."

"What bully Tom?" Mike asked, whose heavy brow grew troubled in proportion as his blood became heated.

Bob laid his finger on the bruise above Mike's ear.

"The man who gave you that," he muttered; "that villain, Turnbull!"

At this name Mike started convulsively, and gave the table such a blow with his fist that the glasses and pots leaped up.

"Where is he?—where is he?" he shouted. "Oh! I will kill him this time!"

"I only hope you say the truth," Bob thought.

Snail clapped his hands, and repeated that the ball was about to be opened. He was not mistaken. Turnbull had heard Mike's

threat, so he ran and challenged him by name. An instant later the tap-room presented the aspect of a prize-ring. All the customers of the Pipe and Pot arranged themselves round the reservation formed by Lantern's care. Behind the men could be seen Peg Green, Red-headed Sal, and Loo, who still sang in a hollow and monotonous voice. Madge, of course, took her place among the men; her hat, jacket, boots, pipe, and beard gave her an incontestable claim to this honour.

Peg Green and her aide-de-camp had closed the front door, for it was past midnight. Mike and Turnbull were standing opposite each other, the former seconded by his new friend Bob, the latter by Fat Charley. The two champions were preparing for action, while the seconds arranged the preliminaries. At this moment there was a low tap at the front door.

"Don't open, Peg," Mitchell shouted, "or I'll strangle you. It is the police."

The landlady had laid her ear against the door.

"Open, Peggy, my darling," a voice outside said; "it is only an old friend, who has come to see you, and you will have no cause to regret his visit."

"Good Lord!" Peg muttered; "it's the voice of Gilbert Paterson, whom I have not seen for ten years, and who, I heard, is managing man to the rich Earl of Whitemanor. Good gracious! he's the last man I ever loved."

"Peggy, my darling, Peggy."

"I am going to open," the landlady said, putting an end to the uncertainty; "in any case, he's a rogue, and so has a right to come in here."

She removed the bars, and the Earl's steward entered. He was wrapped in a large topcoat, and his pot hat was drawn down over his eyes.

"Good evening, Peggy," he said, suddenly changing his tone, "good evening."

"Gracious me, Gilbert, how fat you have grown, and old, too, and grey-headed, my man."

"The same in heart, though, Peg. There's a fight here tonight, I see. I'll wait till it is over."

"What for?"

"I want a rogue who has neither fear nor compassion, Peg."

"You can make your pick here, Gilbert. Help me to bar the door again."

The door was re-fastened, and Paterson, who looked thoughtful and downcast, sat down alone at a table, while Peggy re-

turned to her bench. She had hardly reached it, however, when there came a second knock at the door.

"Peg, you old witch," a man said roughly, "open the door, or I'll fire your hole."

Peg doubtless recognised the voice, for she hastened to draw the bolts. A man about the middle height and of Herculean stature entered. Like Paterson, he was wrapped in an Ulster.

"Is Bob here?" he asked.

"There's a fight just coming off," Peg answered.

"All right."

The new comer walked towards the tap-room.

"I'll kill you, or be killed myself," Mike howled at this moment.

"Right you are, my boy," the man in the cloak answered, as he thrust the crowd back and stepped up to the combatants. "I'll give two pounds for the body of the conquered man. They are wanting men's flesh for the sick hyænas at the Antwerp Zoo. Is it a bargain?"

Saying this, he threw back his coat.

"Martlett, the Burker!" the company muttered, with a shudder of alarm.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### MUD AND BLOOD

THOMAS MARTLETT, the continuator of the criminal records of Burke and Bishop, was still a young man, but he seemed strong enough to beat Turnbull and Mike together. His face resembled a bull-dog's; he had a round flat nose (an enormous nose) and eyes flush with his forehead, peering out from a wilderness of curly hair. All this revealed a frank and imperturbable brutality. He looked round the company, and gave Bob Lantern a nod.

"Bring me a chair and some rum, Peg," he then said. "I don't care to stand. Come, my lads, don't let me disturb you. Fight like brave fellows, and I will drink your success."

The arrival of this terrible purveyor was a slight check to the fun. Snail no longer miawed. Loo was struggling on her bench against the sleep that was overpowering her once more. Turnbull and Mike seemed disposed to adjourn the fight, but that did not suit Bob. The right of the man whom he fancied his rival —the man who was accused of beguiling Temperance—terribly heightened his fury. He placed his mouth to Mike's ear.

"I know a dodge, my boy," he muttered, "that would knock the stuffing out of him. I will tell it you at the fourth round, or never trust me else."

"Well," said Martlett, as he threw two gold pieces on the floor between the champions, "are you going to begin, you scoundrels? make haste, for I want Bob. The stakes are forty shillings, the conqueror will take them, and the conquered—well, hang me, I'll carry him off, for he will want no more punch."

"Mister Bob," said Peggy Green, who had contrived to force her way through, "there's a gentleman now in the parlour who would like to speak to you. There's a chance of earning a fat sum."

"A gentleman," Bob repeated, "at this hour, and a good sum. Peggy, my dear lady, ask him to wait; it will soon be settled. Come, Mike, to work, my boy. Pay him back on the eye what he gave you on the temple."

Bob again touched Mike's bruise.

"All right," the latter said, as he clenched his fists; "come this way, that I may settle you."

Tom stood on guard, while Martlett, seated in front of the spectators, held in one hand his glass, in the other a large silver hunter with racing seconds stop.

"I will keep time," he said; "a minute a round will do. Ready!"

"Ready!" Bob and Charley repeated.

The two champions sparred for a minute, and Mike struck the first blow. Once the ice was broken, the blows succeeded each other as thick as hail.

"Bravo, Tom; go it, Mike!" Snail cried, in the height of joy. "Liquor, Peg Green, for these brave lads. Come, Loo, bring your husband some lush."

There were reasons for Snail's enthusiasm: Mike had broken Turnbull's nose with a monstrous blow, and Turnbull, not to remain behind hand, had marked the other's right eye in a terrible way. They were beginning to grow hot, and the blows were exchanged like lightning.

"Take your men apart," said the corpse-furnisher, "the minute has passed."

Bob and Charley reached forward, each seized his man round the loins and violently dragged him back. Peg and Loo brought spirits; that is to say, Peg a whole glass, Loo a glass she had half emptied. Mike swallowed the rest, and Bob sponged his eye.

"Oh, what a stunning hit!" Snail said. "Look, look, Loo, at your husband's eye; in ten minutes it will be swollen to the size of an apple—it is beginning well. Bravo, Mike; hooray, Turnbull! The noble sport for ever."

"You detestable scamp," growled Martlett; "you snail without a shell, hold your tongue, or I'll sell your carcase to Dr. Kahn for sixpence."

"Very good, Mr. Martlett," Snail muttered, as he looked timidly in the bull-dog face; "you are stronger than I am, but sixpence is no price for a man."

"Is there anything in my way?" Bob asked the Burker.

"Plenty, and good work too, rogue," the other answered; "but we'll talk about that presently. Time's up, lads."

Mike's eye was smarting, while Tom's nose was in a pitiable state. They rushed upon each other furiously, and met like two rams. Mike was knocked clean off his legs; he picked himself up, and was knocked down again; but he came to the scratch once more.

This second minute was honourably employed. But, little skilled in the noble science of boxing, the two fighters tried more to hit than to parry, which rendered the fight atrocious. Each of them had now a bleeding face, on which the hard blows left their mark. They struck silently; but Mike, evidently the weaker, was already beginning to pant.

"Round over," said the umpire.

The two fighters were separated for the second time. Snail quivered with delight, and it required the Burker's terrible presence to keep in the noisy outburst of his delight.

"Je-rusalem!" he said, as he turned on his heels; "here's richness. Did you see, my pretty Madge? Turnbull has two teeth knocked out, while Mike's face is one mass of gore. Rum, Loo. Peg, rum for Tom and my big brother-in-law, whom we shall soon see killed."

Loo, on hearing this summons, tottered up and regarded Mike with sodden eyes.

"Will he be quite killed?" she asked.

"Yes, Loo; yes, by Jingo. You'll see it soon, sister."

"In that case," said Loo, "I will drink his rum, not to waste it."

She drank, and passed her hand over her eyes.

"Poor Mike," she said gently; "how soundly he used to beat me. Take his 'bacca out of his pocket, Snail. I often thought he would kill me. Oh, if he had, what a luxury."

She laid her hand on her chest, and uttered a hoarse groan.

"Fire," she continued; "it's fire I have inside me."

"Time," the Burker said.

Tom and Mike, enraged by suffering, attacked each other with gnashing teeth. This round was short, for Martlett, by a refinement of cruelty, did not allow the whole minute to expire; but it lasted too long as it was. When the two combatants were separated, they were frightful to look on. Mike, seizing Tom's forehead with both hands, had torn the skin off with his nails, and it now hung over Tom's eyes like a bloodstained thick bandage. Tom, on the other hand, had planted a formidable blow

under Mike's left eye, and a bump had instantaneously risen.

"I can't see," Turnbull shouted, with a horrible oath.

"I am blind," Mike yelled, his rage attaining to delirium.

Snail turned on his heel and miawed in his impotence, to express the measure of his delight properly.

Both had told the truth. The blow the lighterman had received under the eye in the first round had gradually swelled, and even bunged up his right eye; the last blow had produced a similar and more extensive swelling under the other. For his part, Tom was blinded by the skin of his forehead.

"Whew!" Snail shrieked; "that's such a game as I never saw. What will the poor fellows do? Mike, how will you manage to kill Tom? Tom, how will you set about smashing my brother-in-law?"

"Time," shouted the judge.

Tom and Mike remained motionless.

"Tear off what I've got over my eyes," said Mike, whose eyeless face expressed a hideous, brutal fury; "tear it off, so that I may kill Tom."

"Fasten up the rag hanging down from my forehead," Tom yelled in his turn; "I want to crush him, smash him, kill him, and eat him."

"Very good, very good," Bob said paternally. "What praiseworthy sentiments! Mr. Martlett—you have your instruments—just give a prick of the lancet to that mouse which bungs up poor Mike's eye. It wont hurt him. Where is Loo?"

"Loo, Loo!" Snail shouted.

"Not so much row, Snail, dear boy—noise is of no use. A needle, Mrs. Peg, and thread. Loo, my beauty, sew up poor Tom Turnbull's forehead."

"That's it," Snail, the incorrigible, vociferated; "sew up Turnbull's hide. Hang me if the beat of this was ever seen afore."

Loo took the needle and thread from Peg's hand, who trembled as she handed them, for the scene was of a nature to terrify the most hardened mind. Loo stationed herself before Turnbull, raised the bleeding strip with a firm hand, and sewed it up, not a muscle of her face stirring during the operation. Tom bawled and swore frightfully, but she paid no attention. When she had finished, she cut the thread, and asked for drink.

Bob embraced her in an outburst of tender admiration, but the villains who formed the audience fell away from her in disgust. She returned to the bar, where she tottered a few steps,

and then held her chest, as she groaned her ordinary complaint—

"Fire—I have fire inside me!"

Then she fell senseless on the ground.

During this interlude, Martlett, who was a bit of a surgeon, had lanced Mike's eye. The two pugilists dragged themselves towards each other, and rage alone supported them henceforth. It was fearful to look on.

"Enough! they have had enough!" a voice from the crowd exclaimed.

Everybody joined in chorus to the same effect.

"Silence, you scoundrels," thundered the Burker. "Do you think I shall pay two sous for a living man? That's not saleable now—they are so squeamish?"

"Be firm, Mike, my good boy," Bob whispered in the lighterman's ear; "do what I told you, and don't feel nervous about the rest."

Turnbull came up as usual with outstretched fists. Mike did not place himself on guard, and received a deluge of blows without a groan; but, taking his opportunity, he clutched Turnbull by the hair, drew him forward, and gave him an upper cut. Turnbull, quite confused, tottered when Mike loosed his hold; but all was not over yet; and Bob's lesson was more perfect than that. While Tom was painfully regaining his balance, Mike rushed forward with all his strength, and dashed his head into the centre of unhappy Tom's chest, which cracked dully. Streams of blood inundated the ground at the same moment, and Turnbull fell like a lifeless log; Mike, falling exhausted, lay in the dust by his side.

"Foul! that's a nigger's blow! it's fair! he pulled his hair!" so intermingled the cries; but half-an-hour later a deep silence prevailed in the house, all the sounds so recently heard had ceased. Snail had gone off, dragged away by pretty Madge, his wife, who expressed her satisfaction with the evening's amusement, and bearing unfortunate Loo, whom the night-fog nearly choked. The other customers had followed Snail's example, after throwing some covering over the bodies, living or dead, of the two pugilists. Still, some persons remained in the house.

"Be off, Peg," the Burker said—"free us of your presence, old lady. Cut, Sal, as quick as lightning. We have a job to talk about."

Mother Green and Red-headed Sal, who were engaged in restoring a little order, did not wait for a second command, but fled, muttering a few words of submission. Martlett remained

alone in the bar, for Bob had stepped into the parlour.

"Beg pardon, sir; no offence," he said to Paterson. "I hear you have some orders to give me."

"I asked Peg Green to supply me with a brave and unscrupulous scoundrel—why, it is you, Bob? Peg, on my word, has made a good choice."

"Come here, Bob, you villain!" Martlett said from without.

"You really must excuse me," Lantern replied. "It seems I am a friend of his. I will return directly, for there is a precious impatient fellow waiting for me out there, and it is dangerous to play with him."

"Bob, you dirty scamp," Martlett said again.

"I will wait," the Earl of Whitemanor's steward muttered.

Bob hurried back to the bar.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE COMPACT

"HERE I am, good Mr. Martlett," Bob said. "I have a real gentleman waiting for me; but I give you the preference, as is but right."

"As is but right," repeated the other. "What a man does not give me, I take, friend Bob, and you are a prudent fellow. As for the real gentleman who uses Peg Green's house, he must be a virtuous subject. Shut the door, Bob, so that his tender conscience may not be hurted by what I have to say to you."

Bob obeyed.

"What I have to say," the Burker continued, with a species of embarrassment, "I would say to no other. I never undertook sich a job before; but you have no heart, I know, Bob, and provided you are well paid——"

"Shall I be well paid, Mr. Martlett?" Bob interrupted, his eye brightening; "how much?"

"You have to carry off a gal—it is low, darned low—carry off a young gal alive for experiments of Dr.——, but there is no occasion for you to know his name."

"And how much shall I be paid?" Bob inquired calmly.

"A girl of eighteen or twenty at the most, and seventeen at the least; of a good constitution, well-formed, and without faults —a reg'lar pretty gal."

"I will do it," said Bob; "how much?"

"I know you will do it, you merciless villain. Now, I can't. Burking I don't mind, but carry a live gal—a pretty gal—to that vampire of a Doctor!"

"Oh!" Bob said; "what will he pay?"

"One hundred pounds. It is mean work, old man, and I am disgusted, I am."

"Done, Mr. Martlett; here's my hand on it."

The Burker fell back a step in continued disgust.

"Don't take it if you would rather not," Bob said; "living is so precious hard, and a fellow earns his bread how he can. Have you any of your stuff about you?"

Martlett gave him a bottle, which he put in his pocket.

"All right," the latter continued; "I do not ask for an advance —to-morrow evening the girl will be at your house, friend Martlett."

"Don't friend me!" the Burker said, as he walked to the door "It's low, that's it; kidnapping is low."

"One hundred pounds," Bob muttered, when alone, after receiving particulars. "I don't often gain that at one pull. I'll give him the Scotch beauty of Westminster Abbey. Why, she is a reg'lar annuity to me. What a pity, but she will be well taken care of at the Doctor's—he will cut her up scientifically, in course. But how am I to draw her out? Stuff, I know she is the daughter of Mr. Angus Macfarlane, and that will do my business. Now for the other customer."

Bob opened the parlour door.

"Are we alone?" the steward asked.

"Yes, the gentleman with whom I was talking just now in the bar has left."

The steward took off his cloak.

"Mr. Paterson," Bob said; "good ger-racious! is there anything wrong?"

"Too much," Paterson said, with a sigh; "you must certainly, Master Bob, free us some day of that—bother our poor brother."

"Whenever you please, your Honour; but that will be deuced expensive. The honourable gentleman is not one to let himself be put out of the way easy. I am vexed, as we are talking of the matter, that I let the gentleman go with whom I was speaking, for that is in his line: making stiff 'uns."

"Oh!" Paterson said, with a movement of fear.

"Yes, it was Martlett, 'the Burker,' as he is called. He's 'bout the best on 'um!"

The steward could not refrain from shuddering at the thought that he had been so near a man whose mere name caused him a tremble.

"Don't be alarmed," Bob said with a smile. "He is no longer here; and besides, he is not looking for a job—I only work in that

branch on occasions, and when I have no other means of earning my poor livelihood. Oh! How very hard it is to live these times."

Bob had entirely put off his ferocious air to become the soothing, cunning rogue we knew. There is a time for everything: the time for vengeance had past, and business had now to be attended to.

"Let us leave Mr. Lancaster for the present," Mr. Paterson said quickly; "his turn will come, and, by Jove, I promise to pay him my debt. Listen to me carefully, honest Job."

"Bob, if you've no objection."

"Bob, is it? I do not know what that accursed brother of ours played on his Lordship to-night, but he returned from the opera in a frightful rage. I addressed him, unluckily for myself, to give him a hint about our Cornhill matter, you know."

"Anna Macfarlane? I know. I was speaking about her a moment ago to another gentleman."

"She is a beauty, on my word," the steward exclaimed. "I have seen her black eyes; what a complexion! what lips!"

"Yes, it is true that you don't meet with her match in every street. Has his Lordship taken the bait?"

"The Earl? Look here, honest Jack—"

"Bob, if you please."

"Well, Bob. The Earl did not listen to me; he called me a villain."

"Can it be possible?" Bob said, with emotion.

"Struck me!"

"Never!"

"And turned me out."

"Turned your Honour out?"

"No mistake about it, friend John—Bob, I mean."

"Oh!" said Bob, putting off his pleasant smile, "then you are no longer the Earl's steward?"

Paterson understood.

"N-no. But I have saved some money," he said, "so don't be alarmed. I have not been managing the Whitemanor estates for fifteen years for nothing."

"You wouldn't, true," Bob muttered with a humble bow; "and what do you want of me?"

"I want your help, honest Bob; your entire help. In the present state of matters, we must not employ ordinary means. I am sure the Scottish beauty will delight his Lordship at the first glance, so I must secure her."

"It is a difficult job, your Honour," said Bob, scratching his head; "awful difficult—I don't see——"

"I must have her, I tell you. My service cannot be legally sundered like this; so, if I could present the charmer, say, by to-morrow night——"

"So soon?"

"Silence. I shall not drive a bargain, so do not try to raise your value. If you bring her to me to-morrow night, I will pay you two hundred pounds."

"Two hundred!" Bob repeated, with a voluptuous quivering.

"If you cannot, say so, and I will employ some one else."

"It is a tough job, but tempting."

"Well?"

"Fifty pounds down, and, s'elp you Bob, ha, ha! the little one shall be in your hands before ten o'clock to-morrow night."

Paterson took out his pocket-book, and laid in Bob's hand five ten-pound notes.

"My servant will watch at the front door till ten o'clock," he went on; "bring her up stairs; don't break your word."

"Have my one hundred and fifty pounds ready, your Honour."

Since the money was forthcoming he resumed "your Honour"-ing again.

Paterson wrapped himself in his cloak and walked to the door. Instead of going out, he whistled, and a cab was heard to drive up.

"I can't refuse such offers," Bob growled, as he entered the street in his turn; "patience—once I am a gentleman, and Temperance a lady——"

He suddenly stopped.

"Temperance!" he repeated, in a hollow voice—"it was at this very spot I heard it. Oh! you villain of a Turnbull, I must make you a parting present."

He hurried back to the Pipe and Pot, and re-entered the tap-room. It was in complete darkness; but Bob groped his way along the benches to the scene of the fight. He soon stumbled over the body of a sleeping man. It was Mike, snoring heavily, and groaning and growling in turn. Bob felt on the floor and found Mart.ett's two sovereigns, which he deposited in a place of safety.

"I can't hear that brute of a Turnbull," he muttered; "can he be dead? Let me try. I can feel his clumsy head under the cloth. Turnbull, Tom Turnbull."

Tom did not reply.

"I'll make you speak," said Bob.

And he stamped his iron-heeled boot savagely on the poor man's face.

Turnbull gave a faint groan.

"He may get over it," Bob continued, as he felt for his knife. "No; I could not dare to kill a dying man here; it is too dark, and I should be haunted by the Black Man. No!"

A moment after he was walking in the direction of Bow Street He walked confidently along this cut-throat lane, in which an honest man could not have taken a step without tumbling. While going along he mused profoundly.

"Things is getting mixed. One hundred pounds from M., two hundred from P., that's all very fine; but the girl cannot serve at the same time as a subject for the Doctor and a sultana plum to the nob. It is not possible, and yet I promised M., and I promised that brick P. Breaking my word with M. would cost me my life; humbugging P. would cost me one hundred and fifty pounds. What a fix!"

Poor Bob tortured his brain in vain to get out of this pressing dilemma. All at once he stopped, and joyously clapped his hands.

"What a fool I am," he exclaimed; "there are two sisters, ain't there? One will do for the Earl, the other for the Doctor. Both will be satisfied, and I shall have fulfilled my engagements like an honest man. Blessings on that prolific family."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A STRANGE ADVENTURE

LADY B—— did not sleep all night; when she rose next morning she found two letters. The first read as follows:—

"I send you notes of the value of twenty thousand pounds. I learn that this very morning you will be enabled to exchange them for the diamond. A certain person cannot overlook amorous weakness. I would sooner lose my money than that esteem. Still, it is a misfortune, dearest Fanny, and no fault of yours. Believe me, therefore, ever faithfully yours," etc.

Lady B——, who was a pretty woman of thirty, or thereabouts, folded up this note with a sigh, and opened the second, which contained these lines—

"Madam,—Judging from the honourable character of his Royal Highness, his peculiar position, and the negotiations we have commenced with him, we have cause to believe that you will receive from him this morning notes to the value of twenty thousand pounds.

"Be good enough to enter the cab now standing at your door with the money, and proceed *alone* to St. Paul's. If you delay an hour, the diamond will be on its road to Holland, and we shall find it very difficult to get it back from the Dutch resetters, however great our desire might be to please your Ladyship."

There was no signature here either.

Lady B—— rang her bell violently.

"Betty," she said to her waiting-maid, "go and see if there's any vehicle at the front door."

Betty went out, and soon came back.

"My lady," she answered, "there is nothing."

"Nothing! Are you sure?"

"Sure, my lady. Only a hansom, the driver of which looked hard at me."

"A hansom cab," Lady B—— repeated in great excitement. "What shall I do? Who knows whether the Duke's money may not share the fate of the ring? But his letter is positive; he expects me to obey; hence he has some reason for showing confidence; and if I delay, all may be lost."

She rang again, and was hastily attired.

"Was nothing brought with this letter?" she asked presently.

"Yes, your Ladyship. I placed on your dressing-table a small sandal-wood box."

"Give it me!"

Betty brought the coffer, which Lady B—— opened and found to be full of bank notes. She carefully locked it.

"Put this in the carriage" she said.

"In the carriage, your Ladyship?"

Lady B—— stamped her foot passionately.

"In what cab?" Betty continued. "Oh, I beg your Ladyship's pardon—in the hansom cab that——"

"Go!"

When Betty had departed, Lady B—— threw a Dolman over her shoulders, and, in a state of feverish excitement, hurried after her servant, because it struck her that the cab might easily bolt with the box. She got into the cab and closed the door in Betty's face, who would have given three months' wages to know what this mysterious departure meant. The driver lashed his horse and started at a smart trot, without asking for directions.

The hansom toiled up Ludgate Hill, and stopped on the left of St. Paul's. Not far off was a shut-up carriage, on whose doors was the shield of the Dunois. At the moment that the cab stopped, the driver of this turn-out got down and opened the carriage door. The steps were let down, and a little old woman, wrapped in a fur-trimmed satin cloak, then got out and walked towards the cab.

The driver of this vehicle got down in his turn and opened the door. The little woman gave Lady B—— three ceremonious bows, and then said with a most absurd Italian accent—

"I am your Ladys'ip's most humble servant, and if your Lady-s'ip will kindly permit of me, I vill carry my audacity so far as to take a seat by the side of her most illustrious person."

Lady B—— gave a glance of surprise at this living caricature She had expected a tragedy, and the adventure began by an absurd farce. In certain conditions of the mind any diversion relieves, and Lady B—— felt a lighter weight on her heart. The little woman, in the meanwhile, lightly bounded into the cab, and sat down with an infinitude of bows opposite Lady B——.

"I am," she said, "if it please your Excellency, the Countess Cantacuzene, widow of a cousin-German of His Holiness the Pope. Your most eminent Excellency may place entire confidence in me, and believe zat my heart truly feels for her a truly maternal tenderness."

"Where am I being taken?"

"Signora, yes! Heaven is my witness that I would leap into ze midst of a burning fire to afford ze slightest pleasure to your most illustrious Highness."

"I ask you again, where am I being taken?" Lady B—— repeated.

"Signora, yes! I call to witness ze most glorious Virgin and St. Peter of Rome, ze most blessed patron saint of my late husband, the Count Cantac zene, zat your Highness has in me the most devoted of her slaves."

Saying this, the little woman seized Lady B——'s hand, which she suddenly raised to her lips. The lady started, and looked at her in terror. She felt herself attacked by fresh alarm, and involuntarily her eyes turned to one of the windows, as if to call for assistance. The cab was now going along one of the sides of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and Lady B—— perfectly recognised the spot; but at that moment the little woman thrust forth a thin, white hand, and pulled a string, which caused a red woollen curtain, impenetrable to the eye, to fall over the glass. Instantly Lady B—— turned to the other window; but had scarce time to recognise the corner of Gate Street ere the agile fingers of the little woman had prevented her, and a second curtain intercepted the sight on that side. Lady B—— fell back terrified.

Rendered courageous by fear, she drew herself up, and tried to raise one of the curtains. But the little woman's fingers, hard and cold as if made of ivory, were buried in her plump arm.

"Your Highness must not take so much of trouble," she said; "it is not decent that ze public should thus see in zis modest equipage ze noble features of your Excellency."

"But, in Heaven's name," Lady B—— screamed, "where are you taking me?"

"Signora, yes! ze very noble features of ze radiant face of your most illustrious Highness. I believe zat your Highness spoke? I ought to have told you at once zat Heaven has deprived me of the use of my ears."

Lady B—— hurriedly felt the seat, at the spot where she had laid the little box. It had disappeared.

"Good Heavens!" she muttered.

"If, on the other hand," the little woman went on, with unruffled serenity, "your Excellency wish to remain here, she must be good enough not to touch the curtains put up expressly for her."

Lady B—— shuddered, and let her eyelids droop, so that she might no longer see the fiery luminous eyeballs that flashed diabolically in the gloom. The little woman said no more, and they proceeded in silence. All at once the noise of the streets stopped, and the wheels of the cab glided over a greasy and adhesive mud.

"We are approaching," the little woman said.

Almost immediately after the cab stopped, and the door opened.

"Zere! your Highness can now look as much as she pleases," the Italian said, with an amiable smile; "she will deign to wait a moment for me."

The coachman offered his arm, and the Countess Cantacuzene hopped over the mud to the nearest house. It was a strange place, for there was no door, and it could only have been entered by a ladder, and even that seemed a doubtful prospect, for the window-shutters were carefully closed.

Lady B——, eager to profit by the permission granted, leant out of the cab, and looked eagerly around her. She recognised nothing. In front of her was the house to which we have referred in a very ricketty condition. On the right and left were ruins, which could not possibly be inhabited, and opposite lofty walls, above which black branches stripped of their leaves pushed out. The fog was beginning to fall, and both ends of the street were shut up by a barricade of mist.

As they had driven a long time, the spot must be a great distance from St. Paul's, such was the sole condition Lady B—— could arrive at. Still, this was not absolute, for the cab might have been driven round and round in order to deceive her. Hence the permission granted Lady B—— was perfectly useless.

In her despair, she fixed her eyes on her companion, who was performing very strange manœuvres. Standing on tip-toe, she

was striving to reach a small hole in the ground floor shutters, and could not manage it. At length she hailed the coachman, who, taking her in his arms, lifted her to it. She placed her mouth to the hole and gave a low signal.

"Who is there?" a voice growled behind the shutter.

"Lady of ze Night, my dear," the little woman replied through the hole in Italian.

The voice inside was silent. Lady B—— was unable to distinguish the words uttered. All this seemed to her to attain the limits of the impossible. She almost fancied herself the sport of a wild dream.

"Well, well?" the little woman went on, with an angry tone.

"Speak in decent English, hang it," the coachman said; "there is more than one worthy fellow in there who does not understand a word of your French lingo."

"Lady of ze Night," the little woman said with rather good grace.

"There!" she added, between her teeth. "Oh! my faith, they make me speak so many languages, that I shall lose my own at last."

"Look out," the voice inside answered.

The coachman and the little woman stepped aside, and the precaution was highly necessary. The two shutters suddenly opened, and the lower part of the window, which was of wood, painted to represent stone, fell down at the same moment, like the step of a carriage, and offered a wide and convenient passage.

When this singular house, which seemed so dead and uninhabited, with its hermetically closed windows and red walls, without a sign of a door, suddenly gave signs of life, and opened its planks to offer a passage for visitors, Lady B—— more and more fancied she must be dreaming. It was the little woman who undertook to prove the reality of all that was taking place.

"Turn round, Joe," she said to the driver, "and wait for us at the gate."

Then she walk d to the cab and offered her white but wrinkled hand to Lady B——.

"Your Highness will be kind enough to make haste," she added, with a deep bow; "for this entrance never remains long open."

Lady B—— got out, and the old woman restored her the coffer, which she had dexterously concealed under her cloak.

"Here is the property of your most serene Excellency," she then said; "I wished to spare you the trouble of looking after it during our drive."

And as Lady B—— hesitated upon entering the gloom that appeared beyond the doorway, the little woman made a ceremonious curtsey, and said:

"Your Highness will permit me to do her the honours, for I am at home."

Lady B——, overcoming her fears, crossed the threshold. The little woman followed her closely, and immediately a noise of moving planks was heard behind them. Lady B—— turned, the doorway had disappeared. She found herself in utter darkness.

"Where am I?" she said, in a low and trembling voice.

"Turn to the left, your Ladyship," said the coarse voice which had answered the Countess Cantacuzene from behind the shutters; "if you go a yard to your right, I will not answer for your neck."

"Well, is your Highness changed into stone?" the little woman asked, in the distance.

"Where are you, madam, where are you?" Lady B—— exclaimed; "I cannot see you."

She took a few steps haphazard, when a powerful arm seized her.

"She was going, by Jinks! right into the hole," the rough voice said, with a brutal laugh. "Didn't I tell you to keep to the left if you wished to escape a trifling fall of forty feet. Come, get on with you."

Lady B—— walked in this new direction mechanically and with that fictitious calmness which terror, raised to its extreme, sometimes produces. She heard a door open about two paces ahead. At the same moment, a ruddy light became visible, and a discordant echo, composed of a thousand confused noises, reached her ear. The door that gave passage to this light and noise was at the top of three stairs, on which the old woman was standing.

"Your most serene Excellency must not feel ze surprise at anyting," she said; "we are going to pass through a place zat is not extremely agreeable, but it will not take a minute, and I guarantee your safety."

Lady B—— passed through the door, but had scarce entered the narrow passage that followed ere the noises were redoubled. It was a medley of noises—sneezing, talking, shouting, and blaspheming. At the same time the atmosphere changed its temper-

ature. Instead of the icy damp that prevailed in the first room, it was now a hot air, impregnated with greasy vapours. These smells acted powerfully on Lady B——'s delicate nerves, already so seriously shaken. She stopped, incapable of taking a step further.

"What's ze matter with your Excellency?" the little woman exclaimed. "Oh! a slight disgust—that smell, which I am compelled to avow is not very pleasant, comes from these poor persons' kitchen. They must eat; your Highness cannot expect them to die of hunger."

While speaking she had placed her smelling bottle to Lady B——'s nose.

"A little courage," she then continued; "you have got over ze worst."

Lady B—— at once continued her walk, for she had reached that stage in which nothing seems surprising. The noise gradually increased, and they were soon only separated from it by a ricketty door, which the old woman opened.

Lady B—— at once covered her ears; then she withdrew her hands from them to protect her nose against the intolerable smell that suffocated her. Her eyes were instinctively closed.

"A little more courage," the little old woman repeated.

The place Lady B—— had entered was a large square room, without furniture of any description. All along the walls there was a species of bed, composed of trampled straw, fragments of which were mingled with the dust that covered the floor. On this straw lay a horrible, dirty, worn set of beings, among whom every age and both sexes were represented. There were girls, whose features, however excellently designed, had assumed a repulsive expression under the influence of vice: there were some of them who, after the fashion of poor Loo, sang as they lay on the straw half-naked, having within reach a vessel containing sone intoxicating beverage: there were also old women, whose repulsive aspect no words could represent.

The men were fewer in number, and possibly less hideous, because the degradation of man has limits more restricted than the fall of women. But, though less hideous, the men were not to be compared with any to be seen in the open air. All their faces wore damnation written in legible characters. All—men, women, and children—were wallowing together, shouting, shrieking, crying, singing, or bursting into mad and most melancholy laughter.

In one corner of the room was a huge stove, the smoke of

which escaped through a hole in the ceiling, and before it chunks of meat were cooking. The sickly smell of the cooking was mingled with that of beer, gin, rum, and tobacco. There were no windows by which the foul odours mingled with the fœtid breath of the inmates could escape—there was only the hole in the ceiling, and the sole light was that thrown out by the burning coals and a few smoky lamps. On the entrance of Lady B—— and her companion, there was a frightful disturbance in the room. A dozen half-covered females rushed towards them, yelling and performing a witches' dance around them. The men yelled blasphemous and obscene language: the children caught hold of her ladyship's glistening silk dress with their filthy paws, or dragged at her magnificent shawl.

"Children, children," the little woman said; "be quiet, or you will be sorry for your impudence!"

An immense chorus of groans responded to these vain representations. Lady B—— said nothing: she felt a frightful pain in her head, that was all, for the excess of her martyrdom spared her the frightful details.

At the moment when the tumult reached its height, and the little woman was no longer able to protect her companion, doubtless unable to protect herself, a roar was heard from one of the walls.

"Silence, you heap of clods: hold your racket!" said the voice which filled the room like the master-pipe of an organ. "If you aren't quiet, I'll stop your drink to-night."

This order produced a magical effect; the men became silent, and the females returned to their straw. The voice still echoed along the walls after silence had been restored. In spite of her blessed state of insensibility, Lady B—— had received a moral shock from the sound of this voice, which had really nothing human about it. Her eyes instinctively turned to the wall whence it seemed to issue, and she noticed the gaping mouth of a speaking tube. The little woman had drawn herself up victoriously.

"I knew I should make them be quiet," she said. "If your Excellency will employ a little patience, she is at the end of her adventures. Sue, you devil's limb, come hither."

A tall thin woman rose from the straw in obedience to this summons. The Italian whispered a few words, and Sue, acting like the driver previously, lifted her to the mouth-piece of the tube.

"Listen!" she shouted.

"All right!" was the answer.

"I am here, the Countess Cantacuzene, who want to speak to some one up there."

"To whom?"

"To a 'gentleman,' for I have brought a lady, and the Lords need not show themselves."

"All right," was the answer again.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE RECOVERY OF THE RING

A MINUTE passed, which seemed to poor Lady B—— an age. She stood there motionless, and apparently reduced to a state of utter insensibility. A little door, situated just under the speaking-tube, then opened, and a person in livery appeared. The Countess took Lady B—— by the arm and led her into a corridor, which three doors, standing a few yards apart from each other and strongly lined with iron, separated from the infernal den she had just left. The third door, which was open, allowed daylight to be seen. Lady B—— gave a long sigh of relief and clasped her hands.

"I thought I should die!" she muttered, and inhaled the fresh air that circulated freely in the corridor she now entered.

"Madam," she then asked, with an expression of indescribable terror, "shall I have to go back through that inferno?"

"Your Highness need not fear," said the old woman, forgetting her deafness; "we will choose a more agreeable road to withdraw. At any rate, it is not a hell, your Excellency, but only a purgatory."

Lady B—— passed her hand over her brow, and, shuddering at the thought of all she had gone through, she said faintly:

"Oh! it is horrible!"

"The fact is," the little woman said, "that there is no pleasure in 'slumming.' But we make strangers who honour us with a

visit enter that way. It is a precaution, your most illustrious Excellency."

At the end of the gallery was a wide staircase. The little woman actively ascended it, followed by Lady B——, and soon both found themselves in an ante-room, in which stood two footmen in livery.

"Announce her most serene and illustrious Excellency Signora B——, and her most humble servant the Countess Cantacuzene, Baroness of Famagosta, in Cyprus, Signora of the Archipelago, and other parts."

The servant opened the door and began to repeat this striking run of names to the best of his ability.

"Silence, Tom, you ass! silence, blow it all," said a voice; "cannot you show in that old hag without so much ceremony, confound you?"

"That man is insufferably brutal," the little woman muttered. "Your Excellency will kindly take the trouble to enter."

Lady B—— was shown into a rather large room furnished with some luxury. In the middle of the apartment a round table, covered with an Indian shawl instead of a cloth, bore sundry documents and papers, while handsome and comfortable easy chairs were regularly arranged around.

There was only one individual in the room. This person, dressed in a blue coat with black buttons, leather breeches, buttoned over worsted stockings and fire-buckets of shoes, stood six feet high. He was no one else than our worthy and excellent friend, Captain Paddy O'Chrane, the suitor of the plump landlady of the Crown Arms.

"Good day, Molly," he said, addressing the little woman; "good day, you old sham. I offer my respects to your Ladyship."

The good Captain had no well-founded pretensions to be a dandy. Paddy wished on this occasion to affect the demeanour of a gentleman, and hence began flourishing his stick in a way that evidenced the most polite education.

"Fie, sir," the little woman said; "you never can behave yourself in the presence of ladies."

"Confound you, Molly," the Captain interrupted her; "we know our duty, you diminutive witch. Her Ladyship will be good enough to excuse me."

He drew up a chair, bending his long body exactly in the middle as he did so.

"Sit down, my dear lady," he continued. "May I be hanged

if I haven't been on familiar terms with more Duchesses and Peeresses than this room would hold, and I know how to behave to ladies of rank. Sit down too, Molly, you witch of Endor, if you like. And now, thunder and turf, let us talk about business."

Lady B—— had seated herself. She, in truth, greatly required rest after the successive scenes she had gone through. The Countess Cantacuzene was the first to speak. The little woman, vehemently mortified by the scant ceremony with which the worthy Captain thought proper to treat her, took this opportunity to put him in his place.

"Mr. O'Chrane," she said, "it is a very simple matter, and arranged beforehand between their Lordships and myself. Your share in it will be limited to counting the bank-notes. And perhaps it would be better for you to remember who you are when you have business with certain persons."

The Captain stared at her in amazement.

"What, in Heaven's name, Molly, you old fool, are you mumbling about?"

"Pray, Mr. O'Chrane, display the proper respect."

"Respect! Molly, you bag of lies. After all, I know no reason to refuse you my respect. Call yourself the Countess of Oporto, or the Duchess of Xeres."

"Silence, sir!"

"Or Mrs. Beelzebub! Marchioness of the Seven Deadly Sins. I see nothing to prevent your romancing, Molly, you old sinner. But let that be: you make me swear like a drunken waterman; and I am obliged to offer renewed apologies to her Lapyship. Once again, what do you want?"

"Your Highness will explain," the little woman said spitefully, "I shall no longer speak with this brutal fellow."

"Brutal, you say? Well, my dear Molly, you can say it, and repeat it, if you think proper. I am rough with you, but I can behave myself with ladies. Come, madam, let us talk like a couple of old friends. You have come to fetch a trifle, an ornament, a ring."

"A trifle worth twenty thousand pounds," the little woman muttered.

"I am not speaking to you, Molly, you impudent chatterer. You have come, madam, to fetch a ring borrowed of you at Covent Garden Theatre: the little scoundrel who did the transfer is a young villain worthy your full esteem, on my word. As for the ring, I have it in my pocket."

Lady B—— handed the Captain the coffer.

"You have the ransom there," she said timidly.

"Listen to it, Molly," the Captain exclaimed. "Here's a real lady, who bows to me when addressing me. Thanks, your Ladyship, thanks. Deuce take it, my dear lady, this little box is very pretty; and I know some one who will be quite delighted with it. How much is there in it, if you please?"

"Twenty thousand pounds, sir."

"See there, Molly, the lady calls me 'sir' whenever it is fitting. It is always a trate convarsing with well-iducated persons."

The Captain opened the box, placed a pair of horn spectacles across his long thin nose, and began minutely inspecting the notes.

"Your Ladyship, here's a ten-pound note which does not seem to me to be straight."

Lady B—— silently handed him a ten-pound note from her purse. The Captain continued his reckoning. When he had examined the last note, he took off his spectacles, and restored the notes to the box.

"Twenty thousand," he growled; "they are there, on my word. That abortion of a Snail has really earned his 'tenner.' Here is the ring."

"Permit me," the little woman said, as she rushed forward and seized the ring just as Lady B—— stretched both her hands for it; "I will undertake to deliver it."

"What do you mean?" the lady asked anxiously.

"Your Highness need fear nothing. It is a pledge I shall keep until the moment I have the honour to take leave of you."

"That does not consarn me," the Captain said, stoically. Settle that as you plase. I thrust I may have the pleasure of meeting your Ladyship again. Good night, Molly, you fraud."

The little Countess, without returning this disrespectful salutation, walked to the door with Lady B——. In the ante-room she stopped.

"I have a favour to ask of your Excellency," she said, "and before we proceed further."

"What is it, madam?"

"Will your Highness extend your condescension so far as to allow me to fasten this veil on your forehead?"

Lady B—— made no reply.

"It is a slight but indispensable formality," the Countess continued; "and if your Excellency thinks proper to refuse, we

shall be obliged to wait till night before leaving this place."

"Night!" Lady B—— replied in terror—"night here? Good Heaven! Pray do what you please, madam, only let us depart."

The little woman unfolded a lace veil, which, in addition to being rendered opaque by embroidery, was lined with silk, and fastened it very skilfully over Lady B——'s bonnet.

"Now," she said, "I am ready to carry out your Excellency's wishes. Let us go."

They went down a staircase. Lady B—— could confusedly notice daylight below the veil, but was quite unable to distinguish objects. At the foot of the stairs, the sharp wind that met her alone told her that she was leaving the house. A few minutes later she found herself seated in the cab, whose red curtains were still closed. The little woman politely helped her to remove the veil.

"Your Highness will pardon," she said, "all these small precautions. It is not that we do not place the most absolute confidence in you, but an accident might have happened."

The hansom rattled on for about an hour. The little woman chattered, or was silent, but it was all one to Lady B——. She, in fact, was in a state of prolonged confusion. All she had seen constantly crossed her distracted imagination. The cab at length stopped, and the curtains were drawn back. They were in front of Lady B——'s mansion. The driver remained motionless, and seemed to see nothing.

"If your Excellency wishes to get out," the little woman said, with a respectful bow, "here is your house."

Lady B—— did not stir. The Countess Cantacuzene ventured to take her hand, which she softly pressed.

"Here is the diamond of your very illustrious Highness," she continued.

Lady B—— let her dull eyes settle on the ring, but so soon as she perceived it, memory suddenly returned. She seized it with unnecessary avidity, leaped into the street without the help of the cab driver, who offered his hand, and hurried up the steps of her door, at which she rapped incessantly until the footman opened. Before going in she cast a look of indescribable terror behind her.

"Addio, your Excellency, addio!" the Countess Cantacuzene said softly.

Then she added, addressing the coachman:

"Wimpole Street, Joe, at full speed! We are behind time."

Joe flogged his horses: the cab bounded wildly over the stones, spattering the pedestrians, and soon stopped at the door in Wimpole Street.

"Have the carriage got ready," the little woman said to the footman who opened the door. "Where is my niece?"

"The Princess is in her boudoir with a gentleman," the French lady's-maid answered.

"Ah! and Mackenzie?"

"Is up stairs, madam. Shall I announce your Grace to the Princess?"

"No; go up to my room: I am going to dress myself."

The Countess Cantacuzene, who was the little Duchess de Gêvres, which did not prevent her from being Molly, the humbug, as well, as Captain O'Chrane called her, reached the floor inhabited by her niece, the widow of the greatly regretted Prince de Longueville. Here, instead of entering by the principal door, she drew back a panel in the wall, and entered a narrow passage, at the end of which was a closet. A dim light filtered through several holes bored in the wall of the boudoir.

The little Frenchwoman placed her eye to one of the holes and saw, three paces from her, in the adjoining room, Brian Lancaster and the Princess seated side by side on a sofa.

"That is capital," she muttered.

"Hush!" a voice said in the gloom.

"What! are you there? What are the turtle doves saying?"

"They are looking at each other."

"That is remarkably clear," the little Frenchwoman said, with a grin.

The listener had told the truth: Susannah and Brian were looking at each other. Mr. Lancaster had been in the room some time, and they had exchanged but a few rare sentences.

Brian was no longer the man of the previous evening—absent—occupied by a fixed idea, and ready to play before a crowded house the bold farce of his revenge. He was serious and thoughtful: the passion that had seized on him, and to which he only yielded in doubt and terror

was written in letters of fire in his charmed glances. He feared to love too much, and did right to fear it, for he was not in the presence of one of those women whom a man loves at his leisure, according to circumstances whom he idolises when in a good humour, and throws off when tired of her.

Susannah was a woman who must be treated seriously: one of those women who invade your existence, and occupy so large a space in your heart, that you forget everything, no matter whether it be important or trivial.

She, too, gazed on Brian as much as she could, and as if she feared to lose a particle of the happiness which his presence afforded her. She had not altered since the previous evening; her simple joy was not covered by any veil of coquetish prudency. She laid bare her soul, in which there was so much love, that words were useless, and could only have weakened what her eyes said.

"You saw me yesterday," Brian at length said; "you understood me, and yet still love me?"

"Love you!" Susannah murmured; "how, in Heaven's name, can you doubt my love for you?"

Their hands then met, and Brian drew Susannah on his breast.

"King or beggar, saint or criminal, I must have loved you, Brian," she continued; "and if you did not love me in return, I would die."

"I love you; oh, I love you!" Brian exclaimed, with an impetuosity that formed a striking contrast to his habitual calmness. "Henceforth I can only say with you 'I must love you.' I did not wish it, for my life is not one of those in which love has a comfortable place. I am poor, and the little I have comes from a strange, precarious, unknown source. I have engaged in a mad struggle, which must kill me some day, and in which victory would afford no joy. I am, in a word, all that those are who love and are loved."

"And are you not handsome and noble, Brian?"

Mr. Lancaster smiled sorrowfully.

"It's very pretty," the little Frenchwoman whispered.

"It is loving," Mackenzie replied.

"Then you have forgotten your happy years, Tyrrel?"

"Confound you, Molly. In truth, she is an admirable girl. Stay, the fire-eater has changed into a dove, and is going to coo."

"We shall be unhappy, Susannah," said Lancaster; "and it

will be a terrible agony to see you so. But now this agony appears to me preferable to not seeing you at all. Listen. You know what my life is, and with what weapons I, profiting by the foolish favours of the world, attack my enemy, who is my brother. I have now but to tell you my secret—my sole secret."

Susannah drew closer to him in her gratitude; Tyrrel and the little Frenchwoman eagerly listened.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE CONFESSION

"I AM a ruined man, Susannah," continued the Honourable, "and so thoroughly ruined, that my personal resources scarce equal those of the poorest beggar. And yet I live like my equals, I even display some extravagance. The time for running into debt has passed with me, for no one will give me credit. Where do you suppose I obtain my means of living?"

"I do not know," said Susannah, who wished to return to the love-making.

"I will tell you. You alone in the world shall know it. A mysterious hand gives me alms every month."

"So that is his mighty secret," Tyrrel growled. "By all that's good, I have reasons for knowing something about it."

"Every month," Brian continued, "I receive one hundred pounds by various though always concealed means."

"And it is a hundred pounds thrown away, my honourable fool," Tyrrel growled again; "but the Master wishes it, and I wash my hands of the affair."

"These gifts are periodical," Brian continued. "They have never yet failed, and, strange to say, the first payment was made on the very day when my ruin was complete."

"Then you have been near death too?" Susannah murmured, her large black eyes becoming moist.

"I do not know," Brian replied, lowering his voice; "I do not know that. My heart was full of hatred and despair—an evil counsellor. But he is my brother, after all, and God would

doubtless have pardoned me for dying before striking him. I was near to death, but not near to crime."

He was pale. There was a wildness in his fixed eyes, and his cold hands trembled in those of Susannah.

"Brian," she said, "do not be sad by my side, for I cannot bear to see you suffer. You have been unhappy. Oh, Heaven! who has a right to complain? Oh! why cannot we lay down our lives for those we love? If we could, you should not suffer any longer."

In her turn, she drew Lancaster's hands to her, and pressed them passionately against her heart.

"Alas!" she continued; "who am I to offer you consolation? I have only my love to give you; but that is yours, wholly yours. If I keep back any portion, it is to offer it to that discreet and kindly hand which——"

"Do not speak of that," Lancaster interrupted her with a frown. "I have told you my secret; keep it even towards me. Do you know the feelings of a gentleman accepting alms?"

"No," Susannah said timidly, lowering her eyes before that haughty glance. "Have I offended you? No; you smile. Thanks, oh, thanks! Yesterday I was very strong—to-day you can kill me with a word."

"You may easily foresee," the latter said, after a silence and passing his hand over his forehead, on which drops of perspiration beaded, "we shall be unhappy."

"No—listen!" Susannah suddenly exclaimed, her loving countenance brightening. "You will have no longer need to receive it. I am powerful—I had forgotten it. How happy I am to be rich! You have told me your secret, now I will tell you mine. Listen."

"Run, run, Molly!" Tyrrel muttered, pushing the little Frenchwoman; "she must not say a syllable further—not another word."

At the same time he caught up a chair in both hands and dashed it violently on the floor. The chair was broken, and Susannah, startled by the noise, rose, as did Brian. The conversation was broken too.

"What is that?" Lancaster asked suspiciously.

Before Susannah could answer, the door opened, and the Duchess Dowager de Gêvres was announced. The little woman, closely following her name, entered, smiling and bowing.

"My dear child," she said, "the horses are put to. I am only waiting for you."

Susannah gave her lover a regretful glance, who bowed and retired.

"You know what is expected of you, my fairest," the little dowager went on when the gentleman had taken leave; "it is very simple, less than nothing. If, by chance, we were to refuse, my daughter, you would lose the favour of your protectors, and the Honourable Brian——"

"What has he to do in this matter, madam?" Susannah asked haughtily.

"Pray do not be vexed, my love—and the Honourable Brian Lancaster, I said, would lose his hundred pounds a month."

"What!" said Susannah, turning pale; "do you know about that?"

"It is really alarming, my love, how much I know," the little woman said, with an accent half jesting, half serious.

She threw a shawl over Susannah's shoulders, put on her hat in a twinkling, and led her to the door where the brilliant equipage with the arms of the Dunois was standing. They both got in; the noble steeds started at a gallop, and only stopped in front of Heather House, the residence of Percival.

The Duchess de Gêvres thrust her head out of the window.

"Turn the horses towards Regent Street," she said to the coachman.

The latter obeyed.

"My darling," the little duchess said to Susannah, after consulting her watch, "we are twenty minutes before our time. It is not too much, for the people we are awaiting cannot arrive at any fixed hour; they may come within ten minutes, or in two hours; but they will come."

Many events had occurred this day.

The Marquis had not left Trevor House since the morning, for he and Lady Champbell had been holding a lengthened council. That clever lady repeatedly left Rio Santo alone in her boudoir while she made an excursion to the apartments of her niece or those of Lord Trevor.

We will not allude to Mary, who, undecided and downcast, only answered her aunt's formal request by tears, to which the elder lady gave a satisfactory significance.

We will pay a visit to Lord Trevor. That worthy and honourable nobleman had received, during the morning, a letter the contents of which he had communicated to nobody. It threw him into a detestable temper.

„Poor Mary!" he muttered, as he walked up and down the

room. "I never could have believed it of that rogue of a Frank; but, after all, ought I to believe it? Of what value is an anonymous letter? None at all."

As a consequence of this assertion, which none of our readers will be disposed to contradict, Lord Trevor took up the letter and read it through again. After doing so, he crumpled it up in his hand and continued his soliloquy.

"It is true that Frank seemed yesterday absent and gloomy. Yes, I am certain he did. Poor Mary! But, after all, of what consequence is an anonymous letter? and has not Frank a right to look as he pleases?"

Lord Trevor was the more angry because he thought himself bound to find reasons for not being so. Lady Champbell approached him during one of these moments, and speedily uttered the word "marriage," which appeared to her the most important one at present.

"Do not talk to me about that scoundrel Frank, sister!" exclaimed the old Lord; "his conduct has been most atrocious and unpardonable."

"I am not going to defend him."

"Oh, very good! Then why talk about marriage?"

Lady Champbell hesitated for a moment: assuredly she had not expected so favourable a chance. Her brother met her halfway; but the change was too startling, and my Lady knew her brother's good heart too well to put faith in this momentary anger, whatever its cause might be.

"My dear brother," she said mysteriously, "it is a great secret."

"I am not fond of secrets."

"That is possible," Lady Champbell said with a smile; "but I know something you do not know. The Marquis of Rio Santo requests your daughter's hand in marriage."

"Very good. I refuse to give it."

"You cannot mean that, brother? Take time, at least, to speak to your daughter."

"For what good?" the old nobleman said, with a frown.

"Propriety demands it, brother," Lady Champbell continued —"It might be necessary."

"I do not understand you, madam."

"Come," Lady Champbell exclaimed; "what would you say if my niece loved the Marquis?"

Lord Trevor recoiled a pace, and the veins on his forehead swelled. It was no longer his slight anger against Frank that he suffered from, but a thorough fit of passion, which might find a vent in apoplexy, or worse.

"Your niece, madam!" he repeated, stammering. "My dear daughter; it is impossible."

"It is true for all that."

"If it be so, madam, I will call this Rio Santo to account; get him expelled from the clubs and resented in good society! That is the least that I shall do."

In the meanwhile her ladyship had returned to Rio Santo, to tell him of the ill success of her embassy. He appeared to be very dejected by the news.

"In that case, I can only withdraw, madam; I have done all a gentleman could do."

"But, Marquis!" Lady Champbell exclaimed, "there is no reason to despair—with time——"

"Wait, more waiting!" the Marquis said bitterly; "I cannot do so, madam. I have offered Miss Trevor my love and my hand—a sincere love and an unstained hand. I have been rejected."

"My brother will recognise his error; so have a little patience, if not for my sake, for Mary's, who loves you."

"Oh, if I were sure!" Rio Santo sighed.

"What would you do?"

"What would I do, madam?" the Marquis repeated, suddenly becoming animated; "I would lay aside all considerations, and trample under foot a vain scruple. I would tell you—but I remember I am not the only person interested. Before all, it is necessary that Miss Trevor should be happy, and her husband worthy of her."

Lady Champbell drew her chair nearer to his.

"For her sake, Heaven is my witness—I will speak," the Marquis continued. "Do you not think, madam, it would be frightful for Miss Trevor to share her husband's affections with another woman?"

"Can you ask such a question?"

"The fact is, that Mr. Percival keeps a mistress, a lovely woman, whom he adores."

"Indeed, Marquis," Lady Champbell stammered in great embarrassment; "this is most serious. Still——"

"Pardon me if I read your meaning. You would say, where is the man who has not had a *premier amour* in his life? Am I immaculate? Since I have loved her, I have not faltered. And Mr. Percival! After loving Miss Trevor, when he returned expressly to demand the fulfilment of a pledge——"

"That is true," Lady Champbell interrupted him, who asked nothing better than to be convinced.

"To marry Miss Trevor, madam! It is at such a moment that he brought with him from France another woman, whom he also loved."

"From France, Marquis?"

"You have seen her, madam. Mr. Percival arrived the day before yesterday; the Princess de Longueville made her first appearance in public yesterday."

"That is true," Lady Champbell repeated; "that lovely young woman whom you pointed out to me last night"

"The same, madam: a girl."

"Oh, Frank, Frank! I should never have believed that of him. In my niece's name, I thank you, Marquis. Oh, nothing is lost now. I will go—I will tell her—wait for me—this time we shall not have a refusal."

Lord Trevor was still walking up and down his library in great agitation, when a footman came in and said that Miss Trevor, who was ailing, wished to speak with her father. He hurried to her and found her reclining in an easy chair, with her face buried in her hands. The tears filtered through her delicate fingers, and Lady Champbell was lavishing attentions upon her.

"Look here, brother," she said; "this is the work of that wretch, Frank. What he has done is scandalous—he divides his affection."

"I am aware of it," Lord Trevor said coldly, as he remembered the anonymous letter received during the morning.

"Our poor girl no longer loves him," Lady Champbell continued.

"Who says so?" Mary exclaimed, as she suddenly uncovered her frightfully pallid face.

"My dear father," she pursued, in a tone that offered a strong contrast to her usual soft and simple voice, "I love him, and it made me distraught for a long time. I no longer know myself—mad and unhappy, father."

"Poor girl," Lady Champbell said, with the best possible faith, "she is delirious now."

"Now he is calumniated," Mary continued: "people say he loves another. Oh, it is frightful, papa, to calumniate a man who is wounded, perhaps dying."

"Dying?" Lord Trevor repeated. "What do you mean by dying, puss."

"Frank Percival has fought a duel," Lady Champbell remarked, in some embarrassment.

"A duel, in England, in these days! Tut, tut! You are both mad now!"

"It is really true, papa," Mary continued. "Take me to him. We shall know the value of these false statements. Frank, my noble Frank! Oh, how I have suffered!"

Lord Trevor rang a bell.

"Order my carriage immediately," he said. "I will go to Percival myself."

"And I too, papa."

"You?"

Lord Trevor gave his sister a glance.

"All this seems to me very obscure," he muttered between his teeth. "Well, there; go and get ready, Mary."

Mary warmly kissed her father's hand. Lady Champbell left the room. She proceeded to inform Rio Santo of this new obstacle; but the Marquis did not appear to share her trouble.

"I will await Lord Trevor's return," he said easily; "I wish to know definitively the full extent of my wretchedness."

At this moment the carriage could be heard drawing up to the door. Rio Santo took a side glance at his watch, and a triumphant smile played round the corner of his lips.

"The game is turning as I wished it," he muttered; "shall I win it?"

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### A DRAMA

Lord Trevor and his daughter drove along for some time in silence. Mary, with an outburst of true passion, had broken by a single effort through the network of sophistries that interposed like a dark veil between herself and her love.

"Papa," she said, "my thoughts are very confused and very acute. Cruel words recur to me merely as things which have been heard in the painful workings of a dream. But you—I fancy I remember—when Frank was accused, did you not say, 'I am aware of it'?"

Lord Trevor attempted a smile.

"Oh! answer me, dearest father," Mary implored him; "say that I am mistaken."

"It is all nonsense," Lord Trevor growled.

"Oh, no, papa. I love him so dearly, that if he had forgotten me for another, I could never forgive him."

The carriage turned out of Regent Street. Another carriage was standing before Heather House, and the little Duchess de Gêvres was looking out of its window.

"Come, my dear, come," she exclaimed, on seeing the Trevor equipage; "the moment has arrived."

She opened the carriage door herself and pulled Susannah, who did not take the trouble to hide her repugnance.

"Make haste," the little Frenchwoman continued imperiously; "knock at the door. Once inside, you will be told what to do."

Susannah went up the steps. The Duchess made a sign

to her coachman, who started off at a gallop. At the same instant Lord Trevor's carriage stopped before Heather House.

Mary had not missed the slightest detail of the scene just described. She pressed her father's arm tightly, who, for his part, had seen nothing but a carriage drawn by a pair of splendid horses.

"Father," she said in a gasping voice, "that woman!"

"What woman?"

Mary stretched out her hand towards Susannah, who was just entering the mansion.

"The deuce!" Lord Trevor muttered; "that handsome woman, do you say? Mary, on my honour, I do not know the lady."

"But I do," Mary replied hoarsely, her pallor having returned.

"Courage," he at last said, concealing his emotion beneath an affected roughness. Then he added in an aside, "Oh, you villain, Frank!"

"I am courageous," Mary continued, with an effort; "but what are we waiting for? We came to see Mr. Percival, and this is his house."

Lord Trevor reflected for a moment.

"My dear girl," he then said, in an affectionate but firm voice, which admitted of no reply, "I have acted precipitately. You ought not to be here. At any rate, I will not carry my imprudence so far as to expose a daughter of the house of Trevor to animadversion. You must remain here, Mary, while I go in and see Mr. Percival."

"I have never disobeyed you, papa," Mary answered, her distress increasing with each moment, "and I submit to your will. But, in Heaven's name, promise to tell me all, papa. I am strong enough to bear it—promise to tell me whether that lady has a right to come between me and Frank Percival."

"I promise," Lord Trevor said.

For about half an hour the unfortunate blind man, Mackenzie, had been sitting by Percival's bedside. MacNab, who had passed the whole preceding night and the greater part of the day in attending to his friend, profited by Mackenzie's offer to take his place, and had hastened home.

Frank had passed a feverish night, but was now asleep. Old Jack was attending to some matters in the dining-room, and he it was who opened the door to Susannah

"Is this Mr. Percival's?" she asked.

"Yes, madam," Jack answered; "but he really cannot be seen."

"He is ill," Susannah continued, reluctantly repeating the lesson taught her. "I know it, and that is why I have come. Mr MacNab thought it was imprudent to leave his friend alone with a man deprived of sight."

"Excellent Mr. MacNab!" old Jack muttered; "he thinks of everything. Go up, madam, and may Heaven bless you as well as all who take an interest in my master."

On entering the sufferer's bed-room, Susannah found herself face to face with Tyrrel, the blind man. It was the first time she had seen his face lit up by daylight; still, she could not mistake him for a moment. Tyrrel turned his large sightless orbs towards her.

"Who is that?" he said, in a low voice.

"The person you are expecting," Susannah answered.

Tyrrel walked up to her and took her hand.

"My child," he said, "you know what is expected of you. Do not hesitate when the moment for action arrives, for you would be ruined. We are a long distance from the Thames now, and your beloved Brian is a precious pledge of your obedience. By the way, we will talk about him presently. You were on the point of betraying us to-day, and of ruining him. But in future you must be prudent, for his sake, if not for your own. Listen!"

A rap was heard at the front door. Tyrrel dragged the girl to the bed, and made her bend over the patient.

"A man will come in," he said—"an old gentleman. At the moment when he appears in the doorway do what is ordered. No questions," he added imperiously. "You have signed a compact, and must carry it out."

Lord Trevor came up stairs, talking on the way to old Jack.

He entered the door, but, on seeing Susannah, stopped.

"Now!" Tyrrel muttered.

Susannah turned pale, but did not move.

"Make haste, girl, in the fiend's name. Lancaster will be the sufferer."

A tear of rage and grief burst from Susannah's eye and coursed down her cheek. At the same moment she stooped and kissed Frank Percival's forehead. An exclamation of fury burst from Lord Trevor.

"Who is there?" the blind man asked.

Instead of replying, Lord Trevor hurriedly turned round and went down stairs.

"You can retire," Tyrrel whispered in Susannah's ear; "thanks, so much."

Lord Trevor got into his carriage again, which drove off at once.

Susannah, ashamed, crushed, and feeling that she had been a tool in treacherous hands, stepped past without answering the old valet, who wondered whether she were Anna or Clara Macfarlane.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE AWAKENING

FRANK had awakened with a start when Susannah's lips touched his forehead. He had seen as in a dream Lord Trevor's stern face in the doorway, and the exquisite countenance of the lovely girl bending over him. He had closed his eyes again with a sigh.

"I have had a strange dream," he muttered. "I saw Lord Trevor and a lady too. I did more than see her—I can still feel on my forehead the icy touch of her lips. It was not Mary, though."

"My dear Frank," Mackenzie said, with a deep sigh, "I cannot tell you whether you were dreaming or no. I certainly heard something in the room, but, as you know, my eyes——"

"Ring for Jack," Frank demanded. "You say that you heard footsteps."

Jack appeared at once.

"Who has been here?" Frank asked with agitation.

"Do you not know, sir? I said to myself that you could not have known Lord Trevor when you threw him into such a passion."

"Lord Trevor!" Frank repeated.

"He has just left the house, sir, swearing by all that is good and great that he will never see you again."

"Eh?" said Frank, as he sat up in bed.

"You must have displeased the young lady too—such a pretty girl—for she ran away like a——"

"What young lady? What are you talking about?" Frank exclaimed, bowing his head.

"Mr. MacNab's cousin, of course: Miss Anna, or Miss Clara Macfarlane."

"Oh!" Frank said again, but this time with an air of relief. "But here is MacNab, who will tell us himself."

The Scot came in, having just left his two cousins; so it could not have been one of them.

"Good Heaven!" Frank muttered; "but it is all too true! Lord Trevor, Mary's father, was here—a woman was bending over me—he saw her and said——"

Frank could not complete the sentence. He fell back heavily, and became unconscious.

"But who is this lady—or this devil?" old Jack muttered, beginning to understand; "Mackenzie—but no, he could see nothing."

MacNab also understood. While paying attention to Frank with his usual coolness, he was reflecting that his head was lost in a labyrinth of romantic ideas, alone admissible under the extraordinary circumstances, and on which his practical mind found a difficulty in dwelling. Who was this woman? Who had set the trap. Was it the second act of the tragedy commenced by Dr. Moore and his accomplice, Rowley?

Twenty times MacNab, forgetting Mackenzie's blindness, turned to question him, but the sad look of the unhappy blind man arrested the words on his lips.

"Mackenzie," he at length said; "Frank is regaining his senses, and I wish to have a private conference with him. Be kind enough to excuse me."

"I will retire, Mr. MacNab," the blind man answered. "I had come to render a service," he added, with a sorrow so true that the hearer felt affected by it; "but to-day, as on so many occasions before, my presence has been more injurious than useful. May Heaven preserve you, Mr. MacNab, from the trial with which I am afflicted."

The Scotchman silently pressed his hand. Mackenzie left the room, accompanied by old Jack, who led him to the front door, and called a four-wheeler. When Frank recovered his senses, he found himself between MacNab and the Countess of Lancewood, who appeared anxious to withdraw while the gentleman was doing all in his power to retain her. Percival did not at once remember what had happened.

"My dear fellow," said MacNab, as he felt his pulse, "you are still very weak to withstand emotion, and, as a physician, I ought

to perceive it. But you are menaced in the happiness of your life: the friend must here take the place of the professional man. Listen to me; you have just been cruelly struck——"

"I remember," said Percival in a plaintive voice. "Oh, then, it is no dream."

"No," answered his friend firmly; "what you saw was reality. There is now a barrier between you and Miss Mary Trevor."

"Her father—my last hope?" Frank murmured.

"Courage, my friend. If I speak to you, then, in your present state, cannot you suppose that I possess a remedy? Collect your strength. Here is another hope in the place of the one which has just been torn from you. The Countess of Lancewood is here, faithful to her appointment. She is going to reveal something of importance."

"No, sir, no!" the Countess exclaimed, feeling herself weak at the supreme moment. "No—the secret is not mine—permit me to retire."

MacNab gave her a reproachful glance.

"No, sir," the Countess repeated, "it is impossible."

"Did you come, then," the young physician asked bitterly, "merely to enjoy his agony?"

The Countess returned to Percival's bed-side. The reproach had produced its effect.

"I wish to speak with Mr. Percival, and not with you, sir," she said haughtily, after a moment's silence. "Have the goodness to leave the room."

Damon gave Pythias a spoonful of cordial, looked at the Countess with respectful gratitude, and then left the room.

The lady hesitated a long time ere she spoke, although, when she spoke, it was to narrate, in a scarcely intelligible voice, a story in which the name of Rio Santo was repeatedly mentioned. The patient listened with widely-opened mouth and staring eyes. The absorbing interest of the story restored his strength.

"And that is the man who would marry my Mary!" he exclaimed, when the Countess ceased speaking.

The latter took his hand; her eyes were filled with tears.

"He is a man whom neither you nor I can judge," she said in a low voice. "What you have just heard renders you powerful against him; but do not abuse that power. Remember that I have your oath, and that I love him!"

The Countess uttered the last words with an effort; her brow became very red, and the invalid felt her hand tremble convulsively. Ere he could speak she had hurriedly risen and fled from the room.

"Stephen, Stephen!" shouted Percival, whom fever had rendered strong at this moment; "paper and ink. Call Jack. Oh, all is not lost! That poor lady is very unhappy. Stephen, quick, give me writing materials. I am going to play my last stake, and something tells me that this man will not conquer me to-day as he did yesterday."

Jack showed his bald head in the doorway, and soon placed the writing materials on his master's bed.

"Shall I write from your dictation, Frank?" the young doctor asked.

"No, no, my dear fellow," the other said warmly: "it is my last chance, I tell you—my last hope."

"His last hope!" old Jack repeated, whose honest face revealed a painful curiosity.

"I will try my own luck myself," continued Percival, growing more and more excited; "if I fail, Stephen, I shall never recover."

MacNab made no reply. Jack shook his grey head. In the meanwhile the patient was writing with feverish rapidity. When he had finished, he held out the letter to Jack.

"For Lord Trevor," he said; "do not return till you have delivered it to him yourself. Even if you have to force your way into the house, do so."

"I will not return till Lord Trevor has your letter," old Jack said simply. "I have my orders, and that is all I require."

Lord Trevor had re-entered his carriage in a furious passion. At first he obstinately refused to answer his daughter's questions; but at last Mary appealed to his plighted word, and the old gentleman spoke.

"I saw her," he said savagely, "with my own eyes. Frank has forgotten you, my poor girl."

Mary had been expecting the blow for some minutes, yet it crushed her. She fell back in the corner of the carriage, and did not utter a syllable. Her father tried to draw her out of this gloomy insensibility, but it was all in vain. Mary remained motionless, not crying or appearing to suffer; only now and then a sigh started from her oppressed bosom.

On leaving the carriage she took her father's arm and proceeded to the drawing-room, where the Marquis and Lady Champbell were waiting. The former saluted Mary with an air of dignified and sad recognition, and bowed coldly to Lord Trevor.

Lady Champbell looked at her brother's thoughtful brow, and then at Mary's petrified face. She guessed the truth.

"My Lord Marquis," Lord Trevor said to Rio Santo, sharply and suddenly, "I refused this morning to give you my daughter, because I had promised her to another. That other, whom I should have preferred for my son-in-law, has gone back from his word, so that——"

Lord Trevor hesitated.

"What did I tell you, my dear Marquis?" Lady Champbell exclaimed. "My brother is an old soldier, whose compliments have at times a rather rough style; but, after all, you see that he assents."

"I beg your pardon, sister; I do nothing of the sort. Miss Trevor is free; let her choose a husband, and may Heaven render her happy!"

Mary, on entering, had seated herself by her aunt's side.

"Well, my dear child?" the latter asked.

Mary looked at her for a moment without understanding, and then suddenly shuddered and burst into tears.

"All girls resemble," Lady Champbell said to Rio Santo with a smile. "It seems as if the approach of happiness rendered them miserable."

"How I loved him!" Miss Trevor sighed through her tears. "Ah, madam," the poor girl added, as she placed her burning forehead in her aunt's hand, "persuade me; tell me again that I no longer love him."

Lady Champbell was visibly embarrassed. Rio Santo's heart was contracted.

"Mary," he said, as he bent down to her ear, "it is true, then; you do not love me?"

Miss Trevor raised her tear-laden eyes to him, and held out her hand, which the Marquis pressed passionately to his lips.

"I have no past," she said, with a species of violence; "I wish to love you, love you alone."

"At last!" said Lady Champbell, with a sigh of relief as she kissed her niece's forehead.

Lord Trevor offered his hand to the Marquis, saying:

"My daughter has spoken; you hold my word."

Mary speedily exhausted the passing energy of this moment of fever. Her pallor had returned; her weak organisation yielded at length to so many repeated blows. She did not actually faint, but her half-closed eyes and ears only conveyed vague and uncertain sensations to her brain.

At this moment a disturbance was audible in an adjoining room. It resembled a dispute, and it seemed as if Lord Trevor's footmen were preventing some one from entering.

"Give me the letter," a footman said, "I will deliver it to his Lordship."

"I must deliver it myself," a panting voice replied.

At length the door was flung open, and old Jack, bathed in perspiration, and with his clothes in disorder, rushed into the drawing-room, followed by two footmen. Lord Trevor recognised him at once, and hurried away.

"A letter for your Lordship," said old Jack; "it is from my master."

Lord Trevor repulsed the letter.

"Take it, my Lord, take it," old Jack exclaimed, "in Heaven's name; my master is dying."

"Withdraw," Lord Trevor said sternly; "I no longer know Mr. Percival."

Rio Santo had turned slightly pale at the sight of the old valet, but the last remark restored all his severity.

"For pity's sake, your Lordship," the faithful Jack began again.

Lord Trevor took the letter and tore it in two without reading it. Jack fell back as if he had received a blow in the face; his eyes sparkled, and he drew himself up; then he sadly bowed his head and gave the proud old Lord a reproachful glance.

"It was his last hope," he muttered slowly and with indescribable sorrow. "My poor master has nothing to do but die now."

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE SNARE

DURING the whole day a man, attired in full Highland dress might have been seen prowling about the vicinity of Finch Lane and Cornhill.

He was not a fling-dancer and bag-pipe player, but probably an idler. His face was almost entirely hidden under long masses of shaggy black hair. Nothing was visible save his small, sharp eyes, partly covered by a formidable pair of eyebrows. These eyes seemed strongly disposed to affect innocence, but they could not lose a singular activity peculiar to them, any more than an expression of continued and crafty investigation which is common to thieves and detectives.

When he found no one was watching him, the Highlander suddenly turned his eyes towards the dwelling of MacNab's mother. At such moments he seemed restless and anxious; the more so as his watching had lasted a long time. He moved about, stamped his foot, and gave his shoulders that shudder as of a cold which beggars of all countries learn on assuming the livery of want, and which we are not accustomed to see beneath the proud garb of a Gael. About three in the afternoon MacNab came to pay his mother a visit. On seeing him, the Highlander disappeared down Finch Lane.

"Blow it," he growled angrily, in pure Cockney slang; "here's a mess. Now, that was all that was wanting! I'm down on my luck to-day. Here's 'the darkey' close at hand, and I shall find it dreffful hard to earn my supper."

When MacNab had entered the house the Highlander returned

to his post. About an hour passed, and then MacNab came out again, offering his arm to his mother. The Highlander's eyes began laughing; he shook his mane and rubbed his hands silently. He waited till the Scot and his mother had disappeared in the crowd that constantly ebbs and flows near the Mansion House. When they were out of sight, he crossed the street and rapped at Mrs. MacNab's door.

"What do you want?" the maid servant asked him.

Bob, whom our readers have doubtless recognised, lifted his Glengarry, and said with a capital imitation of the Scotch dialect, which, being too faithful, we spare the reader:

"His Honour has sent me with a message to the young ladies."

"Who do you mean by his Honour?"

"His Honour, Lord save you," Bob said in a louder key and with a more prolonged drawl; "his Honour! why, the Laird, Angus Macfarlane, of Crewe Castle, of course."

What Bob expected happened. The girls, attracted by his voice, were leaning over the banisters.

"My father!" Clara exclaimed! "'Tis a messenger from papa. Bess, let the worthy man come up."

Bob entered with a jovial countenance, which artfully preluded his tale, and so well related was it, that, in scarcely more than a quarter of an hour later, a cab deposited them in Temple Lane, before Gruff's public-house, where we paid a visit during the first chapter of this veracious narrative, during the riparian adventure of the worthy Captain O'Chrane. It was here they were to see their father.

Mr. Gruff and his wife were evidently made one for the other, if we assume that the law of contrasts is really the one regulating this nether world. Mr. Gruff was a short, fat, ill-tempered man, wearing a pair of carrotty whiskers frightful to look on, and afflicted with an Aldermanic "corporation." Mrs. Gruff was a tall, thin, black-looking woman, whose smiling face went beyond the recognised limits of politeness.

The public-house was not particularly frequented; still, according to the neighbours, they made very handsome profits, and Mr. Gruff was supposed to have some thousands invested in the Funds. This resulted, probably, from the site of his hostelry, which, built partly on piles, looked out on the Thames, and from an artful trap, through which we saw Paddy's mysterious cargo let down on the night when he took a compulsory bath in the river. However this might be, Mr. and Mrs. Gruff greeted the young ladies as if well prepared for their arrival, which aided no little in reassuring Clara, whose doubts had returned.

"The Laird's daughters, I presume?" the publican said roughly. "Come in, come in, young ladies; you shall be led to your father's apartment."

"And he is a lucky father, in truth," Mrs. Gruff added graciously, "to possess such charming daughters. I will lead you myself to the Laird's room."

The sisters followed Mrs. Gruff unsuspectingly. The latter led them to a spacious room on the first floor, whose windows looked out on the river. In the middle of this room was a table laid for three persons.

"I expected the Laird back," Mrs. Gruff said, with an amiable smile, "some time ago; but I daresay he has much to do when he comes to London. You need not be impatient—I am certain he will be here within ten minutes."

"We will wait for him," said Clara. "Thanks."

Anna, without knowing why, looked with childish terror at the tall damp walls and the windows, the panes in which were rendered opaque by the dust within and the thick fog outside. Mrs. Gruff retired with a bow, and in the bar found her husband talking with Bob Lantern. The latter had taken off his Scotch dress.

"My good lady," he said, "I intrust these two far-North angels to you—you must take great and especial care of them."

"We take good care of everybody here," Mr. Gruff growled with intended sarcasm.

"Gruffie," Mrs. Gruff said softly, "hold your tongue. As for these two doves, Mr. Bob, you can trust to us. Have you your physic?"

Bob drew from his pocket the small flask Martlett the Burker had given him the previous evening at the Pipe and Pot, and passed it to the landlady.

"Three drops, my good lady," he muttered smilingly; "no more, and no less, you understand."

"I know, Mr. Bob."

"At three o'clock I shall be under the trap with a boat," Bob Lantern continued. "Do not bruise them as you let them down to me, Mr. Gruff. My merchandise, as that villain Paterson calls it, must be delivered in good condition and without a blemish."

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE ROYAL GEORGE

CLARA and Anna Macfarlane had been at the Royal George about an hour. They were still seated at the table prepared for dinner, and still anxiously awaiting the arrival of their father. From time to time a stealthy footstep was heard coming along the passage, and the rustling of a gown rubbing against the door, as if some one had stopped to listen, or to look through the key-hole.

Clara and Anna had begun at first by chatting in a lively manner about their meeting with their father; then they conversed about MacNab, and of those castles in the air which girls are so fond of building, when the solitude in which they were left produced a feeling of melancholy, which insensibly stole over them.

Clara became serious and thoughtful; she looked with anxious eyes towards the window, through which, at long intervals, there gleamed the danger light of some passing steamboat.

"Clara," said Anna at length, in a half whisper, while she covered her face with her hands, "are you not afraid?"

"What is there to be afraid of at this hour, and in the centre of London?" Clara asked.

"I cannot tell," said Anna, with a trembling voice; "but I am afraid. I never felt such terror in my life."

As she uttered these words a noise was heard at the door, and the girl ran trembling to her sister. Clara's noble features did not lose their tranquil expression. The door was opened, and Mrs. Gruff came in, arrayed in her blandest smiles.

"Wont you try some Scotch ale, my children?" cried Mrs. Gruff, who poured out a glass for each of the sisters; "upon my word, it is some of the best Edinburgh—the real brew. You must taste that, my dears; it smells of your country, or I am no Christian. But, now I think of it, perhaps you would rather have a thimbleful of Scotch whisky?"

"We came here merely to meet our father," said Clara, in a tone which at once put a stop to this double patriotic invitation.

Mrs. Gruff received the rebuke with an angelic smile, which exposed two rows of teeth of a variegated tinge.

"My pretty dear," she replied, "you will, of course, do as you please; but, as I hope to be saved, the beer is excellent, as sound as any that ever was brewed on the other side of the Tweed!" She then curtsied, and went down stairs.

Anna raised her head, hoped that Clara was no longer alarmed, and her courage was immediately restored.

"How cold you are!" rejoined Clara. "Shall we pick a bit to kill time?"

"Can you have any appetite in this place?" asked Anna with astonishment; "I have none; I feel such a weight upon my heart. If anything, I am choking, and should like a little water."

Her cheeks became more coloured, and a playful smile once more illumined her countenance.

"Why should I think of water?" she said, seizing one of the tall ale glasses, the froth on which had completely subsided; "here is something that will give me courage, Clara; let's drink father's health."

She did drink about half the contents of the glass. A slight chuckle was heard at the door.

"It is good ale," rejoined Anna. "Effie of the Muir never brewed better. Are you no longer a Scotchwoman, Clara? Come, lassie, I challenge you to drink my toast."

Clara, delighted at an opportunity of keeping up her sister's spirits, took the other glass, and drank also.

This time a noise was distinctly heard in the passage, of some one retiring from the door and going down the stairs. It was sweet Mrs. Gruff, whose eager eye had not quitted the keyhole during the scene related.

"They've drunk it! they've drunk it! the dear little doves!" she exclaimed, rushing into the room where Mr. Gruff was snoring by the fire; "they've tossed it off like two braw Hieland lassies."

While Mrs. Gruff was rejoicing the street door was suddenly

opened, and a man, carefully wrapped up in a Scotch plaid, entered the parlour of the public house. As soon as he got into the room, he threw back the chequered folds of his tartan. Mrs. Gruff did not continue the speech she had begun. She fell, as if thunderstruck, upon the bench opposite to the one on which her husband was sitting.

"The laird!" muttered she to herself in great terror; "it is Old Nick for sure. What brings him here at *this* time?"

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### ON THE VERGE OF THE ABYSS

THE man who entered the parlour of the Royal George might have been about fifty years of age, but appeared much older. When he took off the plaid thrown over his shoulders and partly concealing his features, he discovered a face originally fresh coloured, which years of torture had rendered pallid.

The man was, in reality, the Laird Angus Macfarlane, of Crewe Castle.

His arrival at such a moment was a downright thunder-clap to the worthy couple. Mrs. Gruff fell upon a bench, while her husband opened his large unmeaning eyes, and twisted his red whiskers with both hands.

Angus did not observe his emotion. He drew near the fire to dry his shoes, which were soaked with wet, and threw upon the table his tweed cap.

"I am tired," he said; "get my room ready."

"Your room!" reiterated Gruff, in a grumbling tone; "your room, Mr. Macfarlane? Well, I never expected to see you to-night!"

"Is my room occupied by any one?"

"All my house is at your Honour's orders," replied Mrs. Gruff, whose unchangeable politeness nothing could disturb; "I will run to see about it, and will be back directly—in less than a quarter of an hour it shall be tidied for you."

She rose, and in passing her husband, gave him a dreadful pinch on the arm; he stifled a cry which was nearly escaping him.

"Try to detain him," she whispered in his ear, "till when you hear me cough; then come up stairs."

The landlady crept up the stairs with cat-like steps, and again took up her position at the door of the room in which were the two sisters. Within was passing a strange event, one that would have moved the heart of even the most indifferent spectator. The ale which Mrs. Gruff had poured out—that remarkably good sound Edinburgh ale—contained a tolerably strong dose of the concoction which the Burker had given to Bob Lantern at the Pipe and Pot; this was nothing more or less than a powerful narcotic. The sisters had hardly swallowed a few mouthsful of the ale before the potency of the opiate began to produce its effects. They at first felt a genial warmth spreading through their frame, and, as it were, a renewed energy. Anna began singing a sweet Scotch air. Clara gave to her thoughts their usual direction, and, for the first time since many days, a gleam of hope seemed to brighten in her soul. And then both of them felt as if the flooring was undulating beneath their feet. Anna smilingly closed her eyes. Clara suddenly turned pale, and endeavoured, with a strong effort, to keep herself steady. A vague suspicion just then entered her mind.

"Sister! my poor Anna!" she cried, in a heart-rending voice.

Anna heard her—her lips opened.

"I have loved him so long," she said, in that happy tone in which persons express themselves who have suffered, and who see happiness again opening to their view, "a very long time, Clara. Yesterday I thought that you loved him. Oh! my dear sister, how I then wept over you a-sleeping."

Clara pressed her hands convulsively to her forehead. "Father! father!" she cried loudly, "are you not here to save your child? Though I be destroyed, may Heaven grant she may be saved."

Mrs. Gruff, however, fearing that Clara's cries might reach the ears of the Laird, slowly descended the stairs and made the call to her husband, who immediately went to her.

"Take your fiddle," she said.

"My fiddle! my dear wife," reiterated Gruff, astonished at the order.

"Hold your tongue and take your fiddle, I tell you. Do you hear what I say?"

A piercing scream was heard from above. Gruff understood. He took down an old dusty violin hanging against the wains

coting, one of the strings of which was wanting, and rubbed some rosin over the bow.

"What's that? It's like a woman's shriek," said Angus Macfarlane, awaking from his gloomy reverie.

"Some drunken hag, I suppose. A little patience, your Honour," replied the landlady; "in five minutes your room will be ready."

At the same moment the bow was drawn across the violin strings, from which issued the most diabolical sounds. Macfarlane drew from his pocket-book a skull-cap, which he pulled down over his ears, while Gruff was scraping away at some pibroch, so that with the last shrieks of the unhappy Clara were mingled the notes of the most unearthly music. Her voice, however, soon succumbed to the powerful effects of an unconquerable lethargy.

"They are coming, they are coming," thought Clara, for she could no longer speak.

"Stephen, my own Stephen," said Anna, encircling her sister's neck with her arms; "how kind has God been to us, and how happy we are!"

When Mrs. Gruff saw the girls immovably locked in each other's arms, she gently turned the key and entered the room. They had, in her opinion, been very long in feeling the effects of the narcotic, and they might still not be completely asleep. Mrs. Gruff, therefore, as a prudent woman, took the precaution of passing the candle several times before their eyes, to assure herself that they were perfectly senseless. Besides which, had they not been completely overcome by the narcotic, they must have been aroused by the horrid screeching produced by Gruff on the cracked fiddle, sufficient to have almost awakened even the dead. The sisters, however, did not move an inch. Their lethargy was complete.

Mrs. Gruff left the pair and went to the top of the stairs, where she coughed in that ostentatious way which, in all countries, is understood to be a call. It was the signal agreed upon with her husband, whose violin was instantly silenced, and the worthy landlord soon joined his wife on the landing-place.

"Is it all serene?" he asked in a whisper.

"Hold your jaw," growled Mrs. Gruff; but this was merely from habit. "What is the Sawney about?"

"There is no danger of him, my dearest. The Laird has got into one of his wandering fits. He has his second sight upon him, I guess, and is jawing to himself, as is the fashion with

some of those Highlanders. I say! my eyes!" exclaimed Gruff, approaching the sisters, in a voice that proved that he freely commiserated their situation, "what lovely gals they both are!"

Mrs. Gruff sniffed carelessly.

"What a pity," rejoined the landlord, whose compassionate tones contrasted greatly with his villainous looks—"what a pity that any harm should happen to the pair!"

"Hold your jaw," said Mrs. Gruff sourly. "Go down stairs and see what the mad Scotchman is up to, and whether he is getting impatient, and bring me up a glass of whisky. Come, man, move, and move quicker too."

Mr. Gruff obeyed.

When he returned to his beloved spouse, and just as he was telling her that the Laird was still sitting quietly by the fire, lost in the midst of his fancies, a bell which hung over their heads tinkled suddenly.

"There's Master Bob," said the hostess; "to work immediately."

They instantly set about removing the table, which they carried into one corner; and then Mr. Gruff, with a boat-hook, caught hold of a rope which ran through a pulley affixed to one of the beams in the ceiling, and drew one end of it down to the floor. During this time his wife was occupied in separating the sisters, who remained lying in each other's arms; and she did this roughly, and without much precaution, for she knew there was no longer any fear of their awaking.

Two sheets were spread out upon the floor; Gruff and his wife put Clara into one of them, and wrapped it around her; they then placed her in a hammock which they had fastened to the end of the rope.

Mr. Gruff laid hold of an iron ring rivetted to the floor, immediately in the centre where the table had before stood, and by main strength raised up a heavy trap-door, which groaned upon its rusty hinges.

"Who's there?" he asked in a low tone.

"A Man of the Night," replied the voice of Bob Lantern, from the bottom of the dark hole.

The pulley was immediately put in motion, and the white hammock containing Clara disappeared through the trap-door.

The rope was pulled up. Mrs. Gruff, during the first operation, had found time to wrap up Anna, who was ready to take

a journey in her turn. But, at the moment when they deposited her in the hammock, the sound of footsteps was audible at the door, and the gloomy face of Angus Macfarlane could be seen in the very doorway. Mrs. Gruff, in her terror, loosed her hold, and Anna's head, being no longer supported, fell out of the hammock and raised the corner of the sheet. Her long unfastened hair floated down to the ground.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE FIGHT ON THE RIVER

THE Laird had come up stairs into the room without any precise intentions, but merely because this was a room he usually occupied when in London.

"Leave me," he said to Gruff and his wife; "I wish to be alone."

Notwithstanding her agitation, Mrs. Gruff had the presence of mind quickly to place herself between the Laird and Anna. "There is only one bale to let down, my Lud," she said, with one of her most amiable smiles, "and then the room will be at your service."

The Laird was now in the middle of the room, within three or four feet of his daughter, who swung suspended in the hammock over the yawning trap-door, and from which he was only separated by Mrs. Gruff. She was a daring and skilful woman. In this imminent crisis she retained all her presence of mind. There was but one candle in the room, which was standing upon the table in the corner, but the light of which fell full on Anna's face. Another step, and the Laird would certainly see his daughter. Gruff was as pale as the sheet.

The hostess, at this decisive moment, seized the cord which communicated with the bell from below, and pulled it with all her strength. The bell rang. At the very moment Mrs. Gruff laid hold of it Angus had caught a glimpse of his daughter. It was only for the twentieth part of a second, but he did see her pallid cheek, her long hair streaming around her, and hanging above the open trap.

An agonising pang struck to his very heart; his legs trembled under him, and he was nearly falling. The pupils of his eyes dilated as they eagerly strained. And then, carried away by the habitual tendency of his mind, which led him to look for supernatural causes, he asked himself if this were not all a strange vision.

The Laird looked anxiously and eagerly around him, and pressed both hands against his forehead.

Mrs. Gruff smiled very sweetly, and said, in her melifluous tone, "Your Honour has been asleep by the kitchen fire; I am afraid you have had some frightful dream."

"I saw her," cried Angus with agony; "Oh! I am sure I saw her there! She was either sleeping or dead!"

He bent forward to point out the spot. Something white upon the floor suddenly presented itself to his view; he eagerly caught it up. It was a cambric handkerchief. He examined it narrowly, and found upon it the initials C. M. F., embroidered above a sprig of yew. He drew himself up to his full height, his eyes flashed fire, and he uttered a hollow groan.

"And Clara too!" exclaimed he, in a voice of thunder; "both of them! both spirited away at the same moment!"

There was something so terribly threatening in the voice and look of the agonised parent, that the landlady flew trembling from the room, shutting the door behind her, and abandoning her husband to his fate.

Angus slowly advanced towards him, seized him by the neck, and dashed him to the ground as easily as if he had been a child.

"Are they dead?"

"No, your Honour, no; as I hope to be saved, they are not," cried Gruff; "they have swallowed sleeping-drops, that's all."

The Laird heaved a long-drawn sigh.

"Beware!" said he; "if you lie, I will kill you! Where are they taking them?"

"I do not know; I'll take my 'davy I do not know, your Honour."

Angus dragged him towards the window, and raised the sash.

"Is that the boat?" he demanded.

Bob had been delayed for a short time by wishing to assure himself whether his merchandise was damaged; his boat was not forty fathoms from the window. Gruff pointed to it with his finger. The Laird jumped upon the window-sill and plunged straight into the Thames.

Gruff shook off the dust with which his clothes were covered, and began to feel whether all his limbs were unbroken.

He leaned his elbows upon the window-sill, and endeavoured through the darkness of the night to discover what was about to take place between the Laird and Bob Lantern.

The fog being dispersed by a strong south-east breeze, which drove swiftly along the heavens the light clouds by which they were dappled, the moon appeared every now and then, and almost at regular intervals, as the fleeting clouds passed by it. The river was silent as the grave. Here and there lighters and boats of all descriptions were confusedly moored. Bob had already got through the tiers of barges, and was rapidly gaining the middle of the stream. The Laird, on the contrary, was still threading his dangerous course among the moored vessels. He was an expert and strong swimmer, who had breasted the icy burns. Throwing aside the water with powerful and regular strokes, he was rapidly gaining upon Bob's boat, who, not conceiving himself in any danger, did not hurry.

Macfarlane continued to swim on with a powerful and well-regulated motion, which proved that his strength was far from giving way. He was not making directly for the boat, but rather straight across the stream, so that, when the decisive moment should arrive, he might avail himself of the current to reach the boat more surely and more rapidly. The barking of Mr. Gruff like a dog sounded above his head without exciting his attention. The Laird continued to swim on; but the nearer he approached to Bob, the more he moderated his exertion, being anxious that no splash should warn his prey of his intention.

Bob's boat appeared perfectly deserted: it was drifting gently with the stream. Bob had laid down in the bottom of the boat in such a manner that his eyes could just peer above the gunwale. The distance he had to perform was but short. It was less important to him to go quickly than to arrive without suspicion, and Bob, in his wisdom, had calculated that a boat drifting slowly along in that part of the river, and where the tide did not run very strong, was less likely to attract attention than if he had been rowing it. He had secured the two sisters as comfortably as he could wish, and every now and then looked at them to see if they continued quiet. Nothing can be more like the attention of a father towards his children than the care of a trafficker for his goods. When the barking reached his ears, he stripped himself of his jacket to place it under Anna's head. The well-known sound produced upon him the effect of an electric shock. At first he remained motionless, and afterwards,

raising his head a little above the gunwale, he cast all around him an eager and penetrating look.

"What the devil can this mean?" he muttered. "Do my eyes fail me, that I cannot see a police boat by clear moonlight? It must be the bark of a real dog, though it is wonderfully like that rascal Gruff's."

He paused suddenly, stretched his head further beyond the boat's side, and looked with eager anxiety at a dark object in the water, which he had only that moment perceived, and which appeared to be moving towards him in the wake of his boat.

"Ho! ho!" he said, "what have we here? Upon my soul, it is a man, and he jist can swim too. Does he want shares in my cargo?"

By this time the Laird was within fifteen fathoms of the boat. He struck out more vigorously than before, and, in doing so, raised his head so much above the water, that Bob recognised his features.

"Well, well, only think of that!" he muttered, without, however, being in the least alarmed. "Who would have expected to see him here? I would rather have bet that it was a Thames policeman—upon my word, I would; but that's no matter. I must be upon my guard, for he is a tough old rogue, and should I miss my first blow at him, my prizes might be in danger."

Bob drew his knife and jumped to his feet. He perceived a tall figure rising above the gunwale. In a second he and the Laird were standing before each other.

The two adversaries remained for a second or two watching each other, both upon their guard, and both prepared to strike.

"Away with you," at length exclaimed the Laird; "my dirk is longer than your knife. But my children are alive, for I hear them breathe, and I'll spare you. Begone; you might have killed them, and did not, and therefore I do not wish your death."

"I can't swim," said Bob ironically.

"Over!" reiterated the Laird, whose voice trembled with anger and indignation.

"Stop a bit," cried Bob; "can't we settle this matter?"

While uttering these words, which seemed intended to produce some sort of parley, Bob sprang upon the Laird with the activity of a tiger, and aimed a blow right at his throat; but Angus was on his guard; he parried the blow. A short, silent, but terrible struggle ensued. In a minute Bob staggered, having received a

wound in the neck. Angus threw him down, and placed one knee upon his chest. In falling, Bob struck Clara's shoulders, who, half awake, raised herself up. The Laird was about to strike another blow. At that instant the moon, emerging from the clouds, threw its rays upon the face of Angus; that of Bob Lantern remained overshadowed.

"My father!" cried Clara, imagining she was oppressed by some horrid nightmare.

The Laird involuntarily turned towards her. Bob Lantern took advantage of this movement, jumped up, and, without attempting to search for his knife, which had dropped from his hand in the struggle, he seized the Laird by the throat with tremendous violence. Clara hid her face in her hands and screamed in terrible anguish; Angus could not breathe. Bob's iron fingers clung to his throat, and, having dragged his head upon the gunwale of the boat, he dashed it repeatedly against it. Then, suddenly drawing him up, he forcibly pushed his shoulders over the side, and, leaving hold of his throat, he seized his legs and precipitated the Laird's body into the Thames.

Anna was still asleep. Clara was lying senseless across the boat, having swooned with terror.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### BELGRAVE SQUARE

BEHIND the noble gardens of Buckingham Palace extends a large and regularly-designed square, and the buildings that surround it are so many palaces. The place we refer to is Belgrave Square.

Don José Maria Telles de Alarcon, Marquis of Rio Santo, occupied the largest and most magnificent of these palaces.

The luxury of this residence had become proverbial; the most sumptuous dwellings of the West End struck their colours to it, and the haughty English Aristocracy were forced to confess themselves beaten in lavish outlay by the Babylonian splendour of a foreigner.

Rio Santo, whose artistic and capricious taste was not satisfied with the meagre designs of English architecture, had completely reformed the internal arrangement of his house. In it could be seen wide marble staircases, as in Italy, and not those narrow, carpeted stairs which the English nobility seem to have borrowed from the Old City. The interior ornamentation was in that harmonious style so admired at Genoa.

It was in this Belgravian palace that Rio Santo received all the eminent personages of every description to be found in London. Ministers did not disdain to visit him, and no one was ignorant that he stood on very intimate terms with the Ambassadors of the Great Powers. They contributed no little to keep up the opinion that his presence in London had a political object.

It was about eight in the evening; no light was burning in the

three large saloons of Hibernia House (that was the name Rio Santo had given to his palace, no one knew why). The hall door, at which two footmen usually stood in gorgeous liveries, was closed. The master was not at home.

In one of the apartments, situated at the back of the house, and which was softly lighted by a globe of ground glass, a young man was sitting, or rather, half reclining on a blue velvet ottoman, and playing with the silky ears of a greyhound.

"How do you like Lovely, Mackenzie?" the young man asked suddenly.

Lovely was the greyhound's name.

"I consider the question impertinent, Signor Angelo Bembo," the blind man answered; "do you not know my infirmity?"

"That is true," Bembo muttered, his careless, handsome face assuming a tinge of sarcasm; "your infirmity is well known, it is the strongest feather in your wing. I feel certain you would not part with it for a hundred thousand pounds."

"Quite true," Tyrrel said dryly; "but still, you might choose to make yourself deaf, and then you would be of some use."

"Down, Lovely. Hang me if that girl you have unearthed somewhere is not the loveliest creature in the world."

"Do you think so, Signor?"

"Yes, by Heaven. Do not frown. I would make no pretensions to her, even were she lovelier, and that would be difficult. From the moment she has any relation with you she becomes to me as worthy of veneration as my grandmother. I esteem you greatly, look you; but I do not like you."

"That is a great loss for me, Signor."

Angelo Bembo bowed.

"I do not like you," he continued; "and were it not for Don José, for whom I would let myself be killed a thousand times, I should have turned up your league long ago."

"That would be a great loss for us," Tyrrel said coldly.

"Great or not, it would be so, sir. There are among you a dozen faces that grate on my nerves: first, yours; then Dr. Moore's, who looks like a vampire; next, that cold-blooded braggart, Major Bingham—a true Englishman; lastly, not to make the list too long, there is the pretended Dr. Müller, whose diploma I should like to have a look at."

"You had better ask him for it, Signor; it is said that he can cut a pistol ball in half on a razor blade at twenty paces."

"That's fair repartee. Returning to my subject, I am no better than you, perhaps, and that is a terrible thing for a man

to say of himself. But, at any rate, I spend my time in amusing myself; and besides, I am not a moral man."

"Signor," Tyrrel interrupted, "I might think that, but yet not say it."

"Avenge yourself, Mackenzie; I have given you cause. To continue my idea, I am a poor slave; I surrendered myself unreservedly."

"I heard say, sold yourself, Signor."

Angelo rose sharply, and repulsed Lovely with a kick.

"Gave myself, sir; gave!" he exclaimed, "I am a gentleman, I would have you know; and if I placed my will at the service of a more powerful one, it was not for lucre."

"Public report may be mistaken," Tyrrel said with vindictive irony.

"Public report, you say? Ah, you measure me by your standard. You fancy me your equal, and only see in Don José—my friend, my master, I proudly confess it—the side he shows you unworthy instruments of his vast designs. If you only knew——"

"What?" Tyrrel asked, approaching him eagerly.

Angelo bit his lip till it bled.

"Down, Lovely," he said with a flush; "confound it, Mr. Tyrrel, or Mackenzie, do not look at me in that way; you will see nothing since you became blind. What do you want? If you had not interrupted me—for which I thank you, sir—I would have said something foolish."

"The Marquis, then, has designs of which we are all ignorant?"

"Did I say so? It is very possible. There is one thing certain, that I know as little of these designs as you do. Don José is fond of me, but I am not his confidant, for which I thank Heaven, for I have a loose tongue. All that I know is, that his heart is great, his intellect powerful, and his will indomitable. The combination of these things is called genius, and when a man possesses genius, he is not content with fishing in muddy waters like yourself, although I must allow that you land angel fish at times. What is the name of your last lovely take, may I ask?"

"Susannah, Signor."

"And what do you intend to make of her?"

"That is another question."

The blind man began walking up and down the room, and was soon absorbed in his thoughts.

"What need had I to speak to that man?" Angelo muttered

angrily. "One word more, and I had betrayed a secret which is not mine—a secret that was not confided to me, which I guessed by accident, and which my poor brain is too narrow to contain. Perhaps I have said too much already."

Angelo was about two-and-twenty years of age. He was one of those handsome youths, with a Grecian profile, whom the Italian painters went to seek among the isles of the Mediterranean to place on their canvas with the names of gods or mythological heroes. In the flash of his large black eyes, piercing and yet gentle, there was a quick intelligence and the announcement of a rash courage; but the whole of his features, however perfect in their harmony, displayed a species of feminine irritability, and a capricious weakness, mingled with childish carelessness. Angelo would be a charming partner at a ball, an impetuous adversary in the field; but where it was necessary to display strength of mind, prudence, and coolness, Angelo would lose his advantage.

He was a native of Malta, where his parents, Venetians by birth, formerly kept up a great state. The English occupation ruined his family, the fall of which began with the passage of Bonaparte through the island on his road to Egypt. The Bembos had been compelled to leave Malta in consequence of falling in debt, yearly heaped upon them by the new-comers. Angelo, deprived of his parents almost in his early youth, was cast adrift without fortune or protection.

He began a tour of adventures through Europe, and at Paris met the Marquis of Rio Santo, who reigned, as we have said, over the pleasures of the great city. In Paris, as in London, Rio Santo had numberless and mysterious relations, whose various branches extended far beyond the frontiers of France. It would be premature to give the reader the key to these manœuvres, which had been combined for such a length of time, and still retained all their play and activity. Too many strange events separate us from the catastrophe for the risk of an indiscretion already, however slight it might be.

The young Italian was introduced to Rio Santo, who took a sudden interest in him on listening to the narrative of the persecutions his family had undergone. From this time Angelo remained with the Marquis, and followed him when he went to London. Then they apparently separated. Angelo resumed to the world his quality of a young Italian nobleman in an independent position. It was his duty to swell the number of the disinterested admirers of Rio Santo, and thus heighten his prestige.

But he still had his private entries to the palace in Belgrave Square. The Marquis was really attached to him, and Angelo responded to this friendship by unlimited devotion.

Tyrrel continued to walk about, Angelo had regained his serenity, and was smiling at some thought, doubtless of gallantry, while his thin white fingers carelessly played with Lovely's silky hair, when, all at once, the handsome dog leaped up and barked joyously, bounding towards one of the doors, which opened at the same moment.

Rio Santo entered, followed by Dr. Moore; he was pale, and seemed exhausted with fatigue.

"That will do, Lovely," he said, as he repulsed the dog, which, but little accustomed to such rough treatment, retired sadly. "Good morning, Angelo."

He squeezed his hand and drew him to him.

"Go and fetch the money that is in my carriage," he said in a low voice; "there's £10,000. It comes from Cornhill. Put it in my safe."

Angelo bowed and went out.

"What is the matter, Mackenzie?" the Marquis next asked. "Doctor, I must beg you to excuse me; pray be seated, I am at your service."

"I have come to know," the blind man said, "whether my invention has proved successful."

"You are a clever man," Rio Santo replied; "everything has succeeded, and you have earned to-day £100, which my treasurer holds at your disposal."

"My lord," the blind man began, with a bow.

"Is that all?" the Marquis interrupted him.

"Not quite; I wished to speak with your lordship about the young Jewess, Susannah."

"Susannah?" the Marquis again interrupted him, but this time gently, as if the name smote agreeably on his ear.

The blind man could not restrain a smile, which disappeared at once, however, as if he had divined the haughty glance Rio Santo gave him.

"Speak," the latter said as he threw himself on an ottoman.

Tyrrel remained standing, and went on.

"This girl, my Lord, is lovely, as you may have seen, and admirably fitted to play the part which will be entrusted to her. But she is in love, I fear."

"Whom does she love?" the Marquis asked quickly.

"That eccentric, Brian Lancaster."

"Brian? He is one of our instruments," the Marquis muttered, too low for the blind man to hear, in spite of his inclination; "and among the defects which lords and ladies leave in heritage to their children, he has, at any rate, retained a noble heart. I am satisfied she should love Brian Lancaster."

"Indeed, my Lord?" the blind man answered; "in that case, I can also feel satisfied with myself. But she is a strange creature."

"She is adorable," Rio Santo said sadly.

"Adorable, indeed, my Lord, since your Excellency considers her so; but she does not at all resemble other women. Fear has no power over her, and I am fearful lest some indiscretion——"

"She really loves him, then?"

"With an ardent and passionate love, my Lord. I would call it sublime did I not detest such language, which the poets have rendered ridiculous."

"You are severe, Mackenzie, and Lancaster is very fortunate."

The blind man repressed a smile, and Rio Santo continued after a short silence:

"The moment is approaching when all those who have served me faithfully will be rewarded beyond their hopes, and be sheltered from any anxiety. Watch over Susannah, for it is true that any indiscretion might defer, if not ruin, the success in question; but do not separate her from Lancaster. I take an interest in the girl; do not forget that, and act in accordance with it."

He ceased to speak, the blind man bowed profoundly and left Rio Santo alone with Dr. Moore.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### DIPLOMACY

After the departure of the blind man, the Marquis remained passive for an instant. His handsome face, rendered pale by fatigue, had assumed a tender expression. Twice or thrice he muttered the name of Susannah, as if it caused a chord to vibrate within him.

"They are her eyes," he at length murmured, "but haughtier; it is her forehead, but wider; it is all her beauty, but more supreme. I should like to render her happy, in remembrance of my past happiness."

He beckoned to Dr. Moore, who had stood aloof during his interview with Tyrrel. The Doctor came up, and in his turn stood before the ottoman.

"How did you find her?" Rio Santo then asked sympathisingly.

"Very ill, my Lord, dangerously ill," Dr. Moore replied, with a grave shake of his head. "The thoroughly moral origin of her sufferings renders the treatment difficult, if not impossible; I only know one remedy for it."

"And that is?"

"Happiness."

Rio Santo gave an impatient start; a cloud of sadness passed over his forehead.

"Do you think, then, that I shall be unable to make her happy?" he muttered.

"That is not the question, if I may be allowed to speak. You

know better than any one the state of moral trouble in which Miss Trevor has been living for a long while. At this momens —no one can know what the future conceals—at this moment she loves young Frank Percival, and loves him passionately. The constant attacks made on her weak nature may have deceived her reason and hidden from her the state of her heart; but, through a reaction, which may be philosophically explained——"

"Come to facts, sir, pray," Rio Santo said emphatically.

"Through an inexplicable reaction," the Doctor continued slowly, "her heart has revolted, and it is Frank Percival who in reality reaps the fruit of so much trouble."

"Do you really believe so?"

"I am convinced of it. After what has occurred to-day, your marriage with Miss Trevor is a certainty; but at this moment she is thinking of Frank, crushed by emotions which her weak temperament is unable to withstand, dying——"

"Dying! do you say, sir?" Rio Santo exclaimed, turning pale.

"Dying, my Lord—that is to say, I am, perhaps, going a little too far. Miss Trevor may live in this condition for some months."

"Fatality!" the Marquis said passionately. "Why did the poor girl cross my path?"

"Miss Trevor, I was saying," the Doctor continued, his face remaining motionless and serene, "lives in the thought of this young Percival. This love supports, but is killing her. Oh! it is a perplexing case, full of the greatest interest."

Rio Santo did not hear him. His brow was contracted by the effort of a silent and bitter agony.

"It must be," he said at last; "this marriage is a necessity."

"Incontestably so. But all the resources the present state of science places at our disposal are exhausted. Apparently, Miss Trevor's illness is a nervous affection, which is rapidly attaining its extreme limit. I have treated her accordingly, but my efforts have not been crowned with success. It could not be otherwise, for the illness is not one of those which can be overcome by sedatives."

"But is there no hope left?"

"Pardon me; if your Excellency has time to listen to me to the end, I will give you a full explanation. In the first place, I am bound to tell you that the day before yesterday I had a remedy which might have proved sovereign."

"What was it?"

"I tried to remove the Hon. Frank Percival," the Doctor replied, with incredible coolness.

Rio Santo bounded from his chair, and his pale forehead was suffused with a hectic flush.

"You tried?" he began violently.

"To poison Mr. Percival." Moore finished the sentence without the slightest emotion.

Rio Santo's eye flashed with indignation, and was then fixed sternly on the Doctor's face. For an instant the latter bravely endured the look; but there was something fascinating and irresistible in Rio Santo's superiority. Moore frowned, stammered a few words, but ended by letting his eyes fall.

"I gave you a confidential mission, sir," Rio Santo said, in the tone of a master. "I ordered you to succour Frank Percival, whose life I had spared, as you know, voluntarily. Instead of helping, you tried to assassinate him, without reflecting that such an act, apart from its inexcusable infamy, might cast odious suspicion on all. It was a bold stroke, and I might make you repent it."

"I knew he was your rival, and I wished——"

"People who serve me must have no will, sir"

"Well, my Lord," the Doctor said, somewhat impatiently, "you are powerful, we are aware; but the claims of the association imperatively demand this marriage, and I am a Lord of the Night as much as your Excellency."

"As much as I?" the Marquis repeated, with haughty contempt.

"Yes; pardon me, I am so."

The Doctor drew himself up to his full height, and collected all his courage to raise his eyes once again to Rio Santo. He found the latter gazing at him with such supreme contempt, that he lost countenance once again.

"You are aware, my Lord," he continued, giving his voice an expression of humility, "that we have placed unbounded confidence in you. Our regulations are not binding on you. You have rights, but no duties. Heaven forbid that I should dare to call myself your equal; but I see this prize slipping from your grasp, and there is no other Peer in London who is without male heirs and with only one daughter."

The Marquis did not reply immediately. He walked up and down the room twice or thrice, and then stopped in front of Moore.

"Had you succeeded in poisoning Frank Percival," he said, "I swear, on my honour, that I would have got you hanged."

Moore started so violently, that any observer could have noticed that the threat was no mere rhodomontade.

Rio Santo threw himself negligently on an ottoman.

"But you did not succeed," he continued, "and I therefore pardon you."

The clock struck eight at this moment. The Marquis added—

"I have only five minutes more to give you, sir, and you have not answered my question."

Moore hesitated for a moment. He, too, in his sphere, was a proud and powerful man. The passive vassaldom imposed on him mercilessly spurred his pride; but he was restrained by some very powerful bond, for he bowed respectfully and answered—

"One resource is left to us, my Lord. It is precarious, I am bound to say, and it may possibly arouse one of those generous objections which astonish us at times, but which, it appears, we have no right to combat."

"Explain yourself, and make haste."

"Every malady has its antidote. Nature is complete, and it is science that is insufficient and limited. I must experiment. Now, doing so on Miss Trevor——"

"Keep from that," Rio Santo sharply exclaimed.

"I am delighted to see that you agree with me. I propose experimenting on some one else. But, in this instance, a corpse dissected will not enlighten my ignorance. I must cross-question life. I must produce artificially in a girl of Miss Trevor's age similar phenomena to those that constitute the symptoms of her illness."

"Oh! this is frightful," the Marquis said in disgust.

"Yes, my Lord. These symptoms unstudied, I shall have to fight them blindly in the dark."

"Why, that may prove another assassination."

"Yes, my Lord; there are ten chances to one that the subject will perish."

"In frightful torture—after long agonies?"

"Yes, my Lord."

"Can you find no other means?" Rio Santo asked in agitation.

"If your Excellency desires it, I will seek; but time presses, and each moment's delay aggravates Miss Trevor's position."

Rio Santo passed his hand over his forehead, on which stood large drops of perspiration.

"Your Excellency had only five minutes to give me," Dr. Moore remarked; "they are gone."

"Save Mary at any cost!" Rio Santo said, in a scarcely intelligible voice.

The Doctor proceeded to the door.

"Listen," the Marquis continued. "I presume you are doing this for money?"

"We are in expensive London," Moore answered, with a half-smile; "and I am a fashionable physician. The question is superfluous."

"Well, sir, if you would gain a great deal—a fortune—save Mary, while sparing the other girl."

Dr. Moore looked at Rio Santo in surprise.

"I will try, my Lord," he said, and as he went out he added between his teeth—

"Perhaps there can be an angel and a devil in the same heart. This man has done worse than we, and yet I saw his eye grow moist at the mere idea of the sufferings of a stranger.

Rio Santo pulled the silken bell-cord. A man-servant raised a curtain opposite the door by which the Doctor had gone out.

"Is any one waiting, Toby?" the Marquis asked.

"A gentleman muffled up in a cloak, your Excellency. He entered alone by the back."

"Show him in."

The curtain was hurriedly raised, and a man of very tall stature, whose features were in great measure concealed by the fur collar of his coat, entered the room with a heavy step, making his spurs clank on the carpet.

"And how is your Excellency?" Rio Santo asked, with a courtly bow.

"Very well, Marquis," the new comer answered, as he took off his cloak and revealed a bony face, with very prominent cheek-bones, the jaws of a horse, and a low forehead covered with a dense mass of hair.

His Grace was a Tartar and a Prince, Dimitri Nicolaewitch, Prince Tolstor, Russian Envoy to the British Court; and when you knew that he was a Prince, you were disposed to find nobility in his roughness, though it bore a great resemblance to brutality. When you heard him called "His Excellency the Ambassador," you were inclined to discover all sorts of clever, witty, diplomatic hints in the twinkle of his little grey eyes, which were ever on the watch beneath the tufts of two large eyebrows.

In truth, Prince Dimitri was a Tartar of merit, who had managed to obtain a first rate position in London, and stood at the head of the Diplomatic Corps. He fell into an ottoman by the side of Rio Santo

"Marquis," he said, "matters are progressing very slowly, and the Emperor, my master, is growing impatient."

"How vexatious," Rio Santo said blandly.

The Prince repressed a gesture of impatience.

"You seem to regard the Emperor's dissatisfaction very philosophically."

"It is vexatious," Rio Santo repeated; "I can say no more, and it is my custom thus to characterise all those unlucky events which it is not in my power to avoid."

"Very good, Marquis; you mean to say, in other words, it is disastrous news."

"I mean, your Excellency, that it is vexatious. However, I am not an agent of your master."

The Russian dug his spurs viciously into the carpet.

"On my honour," he continued, no longer attempting to hide his anger, "this is a strange boldness, which I could not expect. After entrusting in your hands enormous sums——"

"For which I thank your Excellency sincerely, and from my heart. They have powerfully aided my plans."

"After allowing myself to be deluded by false promises."

"Not a word more!" Rio Santo said sharply, and with a sovereign look, before which the haughty anger of the Tartar fell as if by enchantment.

"Pardon me for having interrupted your Excellency," Rio Santo at once continued in his ordinary tone. "You were about to utter words that compel chastisement, and I do not wish to lose the co-operation of his Imperial Majesty. Be kind enough to understand me, your Excellency, and not break, for frivolous notions, a compact which is mutually advantageous."

"Excellent!" Tolstor muttered; "we are going to treat as equal powers; that is to say, you, a Marquis, on behalf of yourself, and I as the representative of the Emperor, my master. It is really charming."

"It is true, at all events, Prince," Rio Santo answered tranquilly.

The Russian stamped again, trying to pick a second quarrel, in which he did not succeed.

"This is the more true," the Marquis continued, "because your instructions contain a special paragraph relating to me."

"How do you know it?"

"Permit me. The sums about which you talk so loudly, if added up, do not amount to all his Imperial Majesty ordered you to pay over to me."

"That is to say——'

"That you are now my debtor for about 350,000 roubles, Prince."

The Prince opened his mouth, and looked at Rio Santo in amazement.

"From three to four hundred thousand," the latter finished calmly; "but I have the exact amount in my cash-box. I am sure that your Excellency will have the good taste not to contradict me."

"No, sir; no, on my honour," the Prince said in great agitation. "His Majesty did really order me—it is incredible—be assured that my intention—but you must have an ambassador of your own at St. Petersburgh?"

Rio Santo bowed gracefully in affirmation.

"As you see, Prince," he said, "we treat on equal terms; that is, your Excellency with me, my envoy with your master."

"There is some devilry in this," the Tartar muttered; "at any rate, Marquis," he added, with a certain degree of courtesy, "I owe you an apology. I was aware that the Czar esteemed your high merits, but did not know——"

"Not a word more, Prince."

"As for the 350,000 roubles——"

"I wish your Excellency to know, once for all, in order to form a decided opinion about me, that the gold of Russia forms but a very slight part of my resources. And if you, Prince, need for your particular service any advances, one hundred thousand pounds, or double that amount, I must ask it as a favour that you apply to me."

Prince Dimitri maintained for some time an embarrassed silence, and then said:

"May I be allowed to ask your Excellency a question?"

"Usually," Rio Santo said, with a smile, "your Excellency questions me without knowing whether it is my good pleasure. But pray go on."

Tolstor turned red, and his little eyes were downcast.

"Do you know the Emperor personally, my Lord Marquis?"

"In sooth, I do, Prince."

"Oh!" said Tolstor, becoming more and more courteous.

"Alexander," Rio Santo continued, "did me the honour to listen to certain plans I had formed but vaguely."

"Indeed, my Lord," said the Prince, dwindling quite small on the ottoman.

"Yes, very frequently," Rio Santo went on, apparently carried away by his recollections. "On one occasion, after a long conversation, in which I had yielded to all the enthusiasm of my

ardent political creed, his Majesty deigned to take my hand, and fastened this token on my chest."

Whereupon he displayed the eight-pointed diamond star of St. Andrew of Russia, which glistened from a pale blue ribbon between the Prussian Black Eagle and the Austro-Hungarian St. Stephen. The Prince half rose, and drew up his tall person.

The Marquis seemed to be reverting in thought to a far distant period. Tolstor stood silently before him, motionless as every well-bred Russian in the presence of his superior.

## CHAPTER XL.

### POLITICAL

Rio Santo had assumed gigantic proportions, and this hand which had touched the Emperor's seemed to the Russian Prince to possess a superhuman lustre.

"Pardon me, Prince," Rio Santo said suddenly, shaking off his reverie, "we are far from the motive of your visit. You came to ask an explanation of me."

"An explanation from you? Heaven forbid!"

"Your Excellency has a Court memory," Rio Santo replied, with a smile; "not a quarter of an hour back you called me to account like a clerk."

"Pray do not overwhelm me, Excellency," the Prince said piteously. "His Majesty the Emperor, my august master, had not told me to what person I should have the signal honour of delivering the funds entrusted to me, and I believed——"

"What did you believe?"

"Will not your Excellency be contented with my sincere and respectful apologies?" Tolstor muttered, with a humility that already concealed a considerable amount of spite.

"You believed," Rio Santo went on, "that you had to do with one of those desperate adventurers who speculate on the secret passions of crowned heads; and succeed, by falsehoods, intrigues, and manœuvres, in drawing some subvention from Princes, large or small, according as they bear, like myself, a noble name and orders on their chest; or, like others, an unknown name and a shabby coat. You considered it derogatory to enter into negotiation with me."

"Fie, your Excellency!" the Prince deprecated.

"You asked yourself, Prince, whether it was not intolerable and disgraceful for a man like you to put yourself out of the way for a little Marquis. In truth, I cannot blame you."

"On my honour, Marquis."

"But the thing that raised your anger to the highest pitch was, that this little Marquis did not ask you for the aid of your great intellect; that, on the contrary, he was so awkward as to keep his plans and projects to himself. I confess, Prince, that in so far I was in the wrong. But, if I must confess further, my life is busier than that of most men, because the pleasures of the world and the hours of forced idleness which fashion imposes are to me a close and serious obligation. Were I compelled to open my mind to all those who fancy they have a right to cross-question me, I should miss the Row, and be regarded by our ladies as a man in business. That is a terrible thing, as you must own. As it is, I am already taken for a diplomatist."

Rio Santo softly laid one of the sofa cushions under his head, and gracefully reclined.

"Excellency," the Prince said, with a stiff bow, "I have nothing about me, I know, that can gain your confidence. I confess candidly that the mystery of your conduct has greatly perplexed me up to the present—not as an individual, but as the representative of the Emperor, my master. I knew that you were entrusted with a most important mission, and could see through its purpose up to a certain point: I handed you over sums which I might be allowed to regard as considerable: perhaps it was natural."

"Very natural, Prince; and you could not think anything else than that your Sovereign's money was employed to support that quasi-royal luxury with which, as you observe, I surround myself."

"I did not say so, Excellency."

"But you thought it, Prince."

Tolstor bowed anew.

"Excellency," he said, finally displaying his ill-humour, "I apologise to you; more cannot be asked of a gentleman, and yet you are not satisfied, it appears. As I do not see any utility in an explanation carried on in this semi-hostile tone, I will take my leave of your Excellency, placing myself at your orders whenever it may please you to summon me on a question not of gold, but of steel, or lead."

Rio Santo half rose.

"Have I insulted you unwittingly Prince?"

Seeing the Marquis soften, the Prince had the unlucky idea of assuming his easy manner, and made a reply in which the Tartar element was most fully displayed. Rio Santo continued sternly—

"We will break off here, with your permission, Prince. You came here to cross-question me, as a superior would his subordinate. I found it necessary to prove our respective positions and prolong the lesson, in order that your Grace might run no risk of forgetting it in future. And now, Prince, if you will be pleased to sit down and listen to me, I will submit an important proposition to you."

The Russian attempted to smile, but the effort only presented an ugly grin, through which were visible spite and fury, only repressed by fear. He resumed his seat on the ottoman with very ill grace.

"I have been told, Prince," Rio Santo began, looking at him coldly, "that you are in the habit of expressing a most severe opinion about me. According to you, I am constantly occupied with love intrigues, mad wagers, and horse-racing. I have even heard that you have accused me of spending my hours in profound meditation on the cut of a coat."

Tolstor started impatiently.

"You told me, Excellency, that we were about to discuss serious matters."

"Your interruption, Prince," Rio Santo replied, "proves to me that you regard these charges as wretched jests. Let us come to facts. I have a service to ask of you."

"I am quite at your service," he replied.

Rio Santo opened the drawer of an ormolu table and took out a paper, which he handed to the Ambassador.

"In the first place, take cognisance of this," he said.

The Muscovite unfolded a paper and at once began reading. Rio Santo, during this while, had taken a pocket-book from his breast, and was arranging various documents, without troubling to watch the effect produced on the Prince by the mysterious document. When he reached the end, the latter allowed an exclamation of surprise to escape him.

"It is Napoleon's plan," he muttered.

Rio Santo closed his pocket-book.

"The plan of Napoleon the Third enlarged and adapted to the present state of Europe," the Russ continued, speaking to himself.

"I had the honour of seeing his Majesty the Emperor of the French at Chislehurst before his much-to-be-lamented death,"

Rio Santo answered; "he, too, in his heart, ardently hated all that I hate. I was enabled to profit by his luminous remarks. This project, which is only a portion of my own plan, was suggested to me by the great man whom Prussia regrets not having given another chance. Has this project your Excellency's approbation?"

"It does not require it," Tolstor replied, at once placing himself on the defensive.

"On the contrary, Prince, I count specially on your Highness to carry out my designs."

Tolstor gave a bound as equivocal as his previous answer.

"On you," Rio Santo continued, "because your well-known skill has gained you an important position among the Diplomatic Corps, which is enhanced by the rank of the Power you represent."

"Still, my Lord Marquis, if, besides myself——"

"I do not think so, Prince."

"The Ambassador of France——"

"May be as influential as yourself, I do not contradict it; but I have no influence over him, and his Court is not comprised among my personal diplomatic relations."

"What a pity, my Lord Marquis," said the Russian, his face assuming a cold and stern expression.

Rio Santo paid no attention, and Tolstor continued, after a few seconds of silence—

"Whatever admiration this product of your fertile imagination may inspire me with, whatever sympathy I may naturally feel for a project whose realisation would most powerfully promote the Imperial policy, I shall be obliged, with your permission, to stand aloof in the matter."

"May I venture to ask your reason, Prince?"

"It is, my Lord Marquis." Tolstor replied, "because I am a practical man, and not a fool; and in spite of all my desires to be agreeable to you, I can only see in your plan a very ingenious Utopia, and the Russian Embassy engages solely in realities."

"Hence you refuse me your aid?"

"I am most deeply grieved to say I do. Your dream, if carried out, would assuredly be a terrible blow dealt at the heart of our mutual foe; but——"

Tolstor affected a polite hesitation.

"But what?" Rio Santo asked gently.

"It is only a dream, in which there is a great amount of genius and a slight amount of fever."

"You are severe, Prince," Rio Santo said, apparently not attempting to restrain him; "I shall be forced to appeal to Cæsar!"

"Excellent, my Lord Marquis; but till the answer arrives——'

"How long do you think, Prince, it will take to have a letter from his Imperial Majesty?" Rio Santo carelessly interrupted him.

While saying this, he re-opened his pocket-book and introduced a small microscopic key into the lock of one of the compartments. Tolstor began to feel anxious.

"How long?" he stammered. "I should think by telegraph in the cipher——"

"Just one minute, Prince," Rio Santo said, raising his haughty eye to Tolstor, who stood motionless in the doorway. "Your Excellency will be kind enough to come and read. This time there is no dream and fever."

He drew from his pocket-book a large envelope, sealed with the arms of the Romanoffs, surmounted by the Imperial crown. Tolstor no sooner noticed the seal than he bowed his head and crossed his hands on his chest, just as Turkish Viziers do in the presence of the silken bowstring that is about to strangle them.

"Read, Prince," Rio Santo said.

The Prince took the envelope, and raised it to his lips with that affectation of mystic respect which is at the bottom of all relations between sovereign and subject in Russia. He slowly unfastened the envelope without breaking the silken thread that held it, and drew out a square document, from which hung the Emperor's private seal.

The paper was unstained, but Tolstor knew what he had to do, and had no desire to prove himself recalcitrant. He walked up to the fire, and held the paper to the flames. Within half a minute, characters written in greenish ink appeared on the white paper. There were only three lines, written in cipher, and a signature. Tolstor, in his turn, took from his pocket-book a crumpled paper, and laid it on the chimney-piece by the side of the Imperial missive. It was a key to the cipher, and this is what the Ambassador spelled out:

"It is our will that Dimitri Nicolaowitch Tolstor should obey any instructions that may be given him by Don José Maria Telles de Alarcon, Marquis de Rio Santo."

"The Prince turned this order over, carefully compared it with the cipher, and finally returned it to the Marquis, saying—

"That is peremptory, Excellency; employ me as you please."

A long and earnest conversation was then carried on between the two gentlemen. The Ambassador yielded every point, and formally pledged himself to sound the Envoys assembled in London with reference to Rio Santo's plan, since such was the pleasure of his Imperial Majesty. He then retired by the secret way.

When left alone, Rio Santo fell exhausted on a sofa. His sleep was agitated and troubled, and the sound of the clock striking midnight awoke him with a start. He rose, but at the first step he stumbled against the body of a man lying motionless on the ground. Rio Santo knelt down. The face of the stranger was blood-stained, and his wet hair fell in disorder over it. His Highland costume was equally drenched and blood-stained.

Rio Santo uttered a cry of surprise on seeing this man's features. "Angus, Angus!" he exclaimed. "Oh, 'tis my brother!"

The Laird did not stir. Rio Santo raised him, and laid him on a sofa. "Angus, Angus," he repeated. The Laird opened his eyes, and looked with a wandering glance around

"Both, both; oh, my God!" he groaned: "both my darlings gone!"

Then his eyes closed again, and he fell heavily back.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### SUSANNAH'S EXPLANATIONS

It was about a week after the events narrated in our preceding chapters. Susannah was alone in the little room where we once before saw her conversing with Brian Lancaster. She held a book in her hand, and her humid eyes gazed absently around her.

During the last week the adventuress had made a great step in life. Her wretched existence had suddenly ceased, for nearly daily she saw the Countess of Lancewood and Brian Lancaster.

The Countess had not attempted to discover Susannah's secret, though she had guessed at the first glance that there was a strange mystery beneath the title of Princess borne by a girl—haughty, it is true, and noble, and proud, but who was a stranger to the thousand petty rules of society. There was also a mystery in this widowhood of a virgin, for Susannah was a virgin both in body and mind.

At the end of a week they were as sisters. The Countess, more expert in worldly matters, played the part of an elder sister—that patient mentor who might take the place of a mother, were such a thing possible. Susannah, more ignorant, but stronger, and gifted, perhaps, with a more powerful intellect, was the pupil while waiting till she became the mistress.

It was with delight that Susannah drank of the cup of knowledge offered by a friendly hand. She listened, she guessed, she tore with eager fingers the veil that floated before her eyes. She

read with marvelous sagacity of the depth of the Countess's misfortune, and gave her all her heart that was not Brian's. But, at the same time, as she passionately enjoyed the new horizon that offered itself to her dazzled eyes, she learned to fear, and blush, and doubt.

Susannah was alone in the little sitting-room that served as her boudoir. Her dress had undergone a change similar to that in her being. Her simple black silk dress, to which Susannah imparted an exquisite elegance, made her look younger than ever, and more loveable. The book she held in her hand was the "Vicar of Wakefield," and her finger had rested at the page where Mrs. Primrose bewails her daughter's flight. Susannah did not know enough yet fully to comprehend the serene poetry exhaled from this inimitable story. But the grief of the mother lamenting her daughter—that grief so true, so deep, so simply, but, at the same time, so skilfully described by Goldsmith—touched her. Tears started to her eyes, and she closed the book.

It was that, for the first time in her life, she comprehended and envied the happiness of those who have a mother With that intuitive vivacity peculiar to her, she had measured at a glance all the gentle enjoyment, infinite joy, and pure felicity that there must be in a mother's love. Hitherto it had been to her a word allying itself with her bitter and disdainful thoughts. Her mother had deserted her cradle; she had fled from her child's society, and had doubtless not heeded her regret or her love. At last her thoughts turned again to Brian Lancaster. He was very late that day. Usually, Susannah had no need to desire his presence, and he had never before kept her waiting so long.

Many times, when Brian was near her, her mouth opened at the same time as her heart: she was on the point of revealing all to this man, who had the right to know all. But had she not been told that the danger did not impend over her alone, and that the mysterious glance of the League also menaced Lancaster's head?

She was silent, for she was certain that there was somewhere near her an ear open to hear. This espionage poisoned her joy, and saddened those moments which Brian's presence filled with such happiness. But she could not complain, and, though so haughty and frank, she concealed her pain beneath a smile.

Susannah seated herself at her chickering, and began singing sacred music. Her magnificent voice filled the room, and her forehead grew radiant under the charm of the music. At this moment the door softly opened, and Brian Lancaster appeared

in it. On seeing Susannah, whose features he could watch in a glass placed in front of her, he walked up on tiptoe, and placed his hands on the back of her chair.

When Susannah ceased playing, she raised her tear-laden eyes and saw in the mirror Brian's ardent glances. She started and turned crimson—not for shame, but for pleasure. Lancaster kissed her hand, and they sat down side by side on the sofa and remained silent for some minutes. Susannah was happy because she saw her lover, while he was still affected by his recent impression. He admired her silently and with his whole heart.

"I have been waiting for you," Susannah at length said. "What has detained you so long? This is the first time you have been so late."

"Was your prayer for me, then?" he asked, as if not desirous of replying. "The angels must sing like you, Susannah."

Susannah did not look down.

"When I pray," she said, "it is for you, love. But what kept you away from me? I am very sad when you are not here. Suppose you were some day not to come."

"On that day I should be dead."

The lovely girl's eye sparkled with enthusiasm.

"Thanks," she said, devotedly; "I believe you, Brian, and am proud of loving you."

Lancaster and Susannah conversed thus, forgetful of the world. The girl quite forgot the incessant secret watch that constantly surrounded her. Still, that did not prevent it from going on. Behind the blackened glare of the black closet in which we lately saw Tyrrel, the blind man, suddenly interrupt the first interview between Lancaster and the Princess, the Dowager Duchess de Gêvres, comfortably wrapped up in her satin cloak, and with her feet warmed by fur boots, was listening and looking.

Susannah's position with Tyrrel and the little Frenchwoman was not exactly the same as on her first arrival in Wimpole Street; she was still watched, but the respect paid her was doubled, and the vague threats by which she had been at first intimidated had ceased. This was the result of Rio Santo's recommendations. The Marquis had seemed desirous of taking her under his wing; whatever his motive—and both Tyrrel and the little Frenchwoman were ever more inclined to think bad than good—the Marquis had spoken, and that was sufficient.

From her post of observation, whither she proceeded so soon as Lancaster and the Countess of Lancewood entered the house.

the Duchess Dowager had not lost a word of Brian's romantic narrative. The honest old woman had laughed heartily in her wadded hood; she had done so, though, at Brian's expense.

In spite of the enjoyment of satisfying her curiosity, the Duchess fell asleep. It was no fault of hers. At first she shut her eyes, because she thought that she only required ears to listen; but once her eyes were closed, she followed the conversation of the two lovers for some minutes, and then the words buzzed confusedly in her ears. It was a painful moment, but at last the Duchess fell asleep soundly enough to dream that she was listening. From this moment her conscience was tranquil.

This happened at the moment when Brian was saddened by the idea of sharing Susannah's thoughts with another, so that the little Frenchwoman did not hear her pretended niece's charming answer. She lost, too, a good deal more.

"What? it was I?" Brian exclaimed in delight. "That *souvenir*, of which I was so jealous, came from you? But how is it possible?" he continued, as he looked dubiously at Susannah; "you have but just arrived in England, and, more eccentricity, I have never visited France."

Susannah turned pale, but she did not utter a word.

"In order to remember any one," Brian continued, with that simplicity of expression which is the peculiarity of impassioned language, "a woman must have seen him—known him——"

"Oh! Brian, I did know you," Susannah murmured.

"When, pray?"

Assuredly, the question was natural. Still, Susannah could not answer without unveiling her whole life, and how many things prevented that revelation?

She turned over on her fingers unthinkingly the gold locket, which was of an antique shape, and bore on its upper lid traces of an erasure effected by an unskilled hand. Beneath the erasure could be seen the outline of the original engraving; and Brian, the first time he saw the locket, fancied he recognised the outline of an escutcheon, with two crowned eagles as supporters. These supporters were those of the arms of Lancaster, but nothing is so common in heraldry as the similarity of supporters. Versed up to a certain point, like every gentleman, in heraldry, Lancaster had drawn no consequence from the doubtless fortuitous event. Still, he had noticed the remains of an Earl's crown over the shield. However, these insignificant details had not dwelt in his mind.

Susannah's embarrassment was so visible and so closeakin to distress, that her lover could not fail to feel suspicious. It was ice thrown on a burning fire. Brian had a shudder to the heart, and then felt cold. He became once more the man of old—the phlegmatic Englishman.

"Madam," he said, "everybody has secrets, and I do not recognise any right to penetrate yours. You deign to tell me that you love me, and that is a great deal; it is, indeed, too much when I reflect on my deserts, and I beg you to forgive the indiscreet questions."

"Brian, Brian, speak not thus!" Susannah interrupted him, heart-broken.

"The indiscreet questions," Brian continued, coldly, "which nothing authorised me in asking you."

"Mr. Lancaster," Susannah said, as she rose pale and haughty, "no more mockery; I do not merit it, and cannot endure it. A great danger is hanging over our heads."

"I do not understand your Highness."

"I am no Princess. There, it is out! You must listen to me now. Had I been so, I should have been your wife ere this; had I been a Princess, rich and powerful, as you and the world may have believed, my rank and fortune would have been at your feet long ago."

He gazed on her in confusion. Susannah's voice, hitherto suppressed, suddenly burst forth sonorous and challenging.

"Listen, listen!" she said vehemently, "and do not accuse me for the misfortunes that are about to burst over us. I am no Princess, I tell you. I am a blind instrument in powerful hands. I am plain Susannah, the daughter of Israels, the Jew, who was hung last autumn inside Newgate gaol."

Brian fell back three paces.

'Israels, alias Spencer," he muttered, "the usurer!"

"Israels, the forger; Israels, the thief!"

Susannah's voice broke down. Still, she uttered the last words loudly, and with that arrogant tone which the prisoner of war assumes when he bids the platoon "fire!" Then she looked around her timidly, as if anticipating an inevitable catastrophe. A deep silence fell on the couple. Susannah fell back exhausted in an easy chair. Brian, with haggard eyes and pale forehead, looked at her as if he fancied he had been having a horrible dream.

"Nothing," Susannah at length said, after a few moments of silence. "They do not order me to be silent this time. They have not heard me."

Brian seemed turned into marble.

"Oh, Brian, Brian!" the loving girl said, as she rushed towards him; "I am able to open my mind to you without fear of bringing death or misery on you. You do not know; they told me, 'If you speak, each of your words will fall on the head of Brian Lancaster,' and I was silent, and I refused your hand, because I felt myself unworthy of you, and I left you to believe——"

"Are you unworthy of me, Susannah?" Brian suddenly asked, in a grave and deep voice. "Answer, answer quickly, madam! The time has arrived when I must ask your pardon on my knees, or bid you farewell for ever."

Susannah did not reply for a minute, which was a solemn one for the poor girl. She felt through her agony that her future, her love, and all those hopes of happiness she had fostered so dearly during the last few days were in peril and depended on a word. But her week's experience had not taught her sufficient for her to answer Brian's question point blank. She hesitated because she did not know; because, even at the price of her happiness, she would not have liked to deceive Brian.

"Answer!" the latter said, with increased sternness.

"Mr. Lancaster," the lovely girl replied, in a low voice, "I am poor, and my father was hanged."

Then she raised her head and looked at her judge. Lancaster put his elbows on the table, and pressed his temples between his hands.

"What can I believe? Oh, Heaven!" he muttered. "Susannah!" he then exclaimed passionately, while all the blood rushed to his cheeks, "I love you still—I love you more than ever. Do not deceive me by your silence. Tell me, in pity, madam, tell me what you are. Do not speak again of wretchedness, for I am poor too. Do not allude to your father again. What do I care for him? It is you whom I wish to know. Who are you? Why this false title? Whence do you obtain this dress that renders you so lovely? By what right do you inhabit these sumptuous apartments? Why do you not require my assistance?"

"I should like to do so, Brian, at the price of my life. I should like to be yours, and owe everything to you," said Susannah, a ray of hope flushing her despairing brow; "but what can I say to you? I am afraid of not understanding you. I know nothing that other women know. I, poor fool that I am, hope, because I can see love in your very wrath. But your questions terrify me. All that I can answer you is, that I only love you, and never loved any one but you."

Brian was dragged in different directions by doubt and emotion. Susannah's noble face told him what her bald language could not express. But there was too much evidence not to accuse her. The gentleman was ashamed of what he called his weakness.

"Madam," he said, in a slow, pained voice, as if each word lacerated his heart, "a man cannot love twice as I have done, and I will never give my love to another woman as I have done to you. To believe you culpable is the bitterest suffering I can endure in this world. I doubted, I questioned you, where another would have spurned you scornfully."

"God help me!" the lovely girl murmured, feeling herself ready to faint.

The nobleman's son felt pity for her, but he went on:

"When a word was sufficient——"

"But I do not know that word, Brian," Susannah interrupted him, her large eyes almost quenched with burning tears. "Do not condemn me thus, I entreat you, by the name of your mother, for you have a mother. If I allowed myself to be called by a name not mine, if I signed a mysterious engagement whose purport is unknown to me, it was to live; and if I wished to live, it was for your sake."

Her hearer did not understand; but her voice and tears touched him to the soul, and he was half convinced.

"Listen!" Susannah suddenly said, her humid eye sparkling with the fire of a sudden inspiration. "I see, I see! I am not unworthy even of you."

"Are you speaking the truth?" he said, as he took a step towards her.

The poor girl fancied that she had discovered a talisman, but this new question restored all her sadness.

"You doubt still!" she sighed sadly. "Alas! I can never find the word that would make you believe."

It was these strange answers, without any conventional meaning, that necessarily drove Brian from that confidence he so ardently desired to feel again. A situation like Susannah's was not common; but Brian, eccentric man though he was, insisted on measuring the mistress he so fondly loved by the common standard.

Internally, his love was robust, and his heart too fresh to resolve on sternness. So soon as he was allowed to doubt, he hoped, and Susannah was in despair long after her cause was gained. In fact, the only thing that stood between her and the lover was her present position.

About ten minutes after Susannah's last words, Lancaster was seated by her side on the sofa. His haughty brow had not yet regained that calm expression which it usually bore. But, on the other hand, there were none of those unlucky wrinkles on his forehead which had rendered Susannah so unhappy. The truth was, that the girl had discovered the talisman—the famous key-word Brian required; she had said—

"Between ourselves, there is only my father's execution and the distance from a Jew's daughter to a Christian gentleman."

And Brian, following the eternal custom of lovers, had passed from one extremity to the other. He no longer wanted explanations; he repulsed them. He began to see a mystery beneath Susannah's avowed ignorance, and he then wished to penetrate it.

"I have learned much since you have loved me, Brian," the beauty continued, with tear-laden eyes; "but I cannot yet answer all questions, or understand all suspicions."

"Do not speak so, Susannah!" Lancaster exclaimed; "forget that I suspected you, for man is weak and unjust. I ought to have fallen at your feet when you said to me, 'I am not a Princess.' I ought to have thanked you on my knees for giving me your confidence with your love, and for braving danger in answering me—a danger which you say is terrible, and which a powerful hand holds in suspense over your head; this peril, be it real or imaginary, terrified you."

"For your sake, Brian, for you," Susannah interrupted.

Lancaster took her hand, to which he passionately pressed his lips.

"For my sake?" he repeated; "have you at last pardoned me?"

Susannah, in reply, only gave a glance, in which her unbounded love was revealed.

"Did I not know that you are pure?" Brian went on, wroth with himself. "Have I not, for the last week, read your heart, which is the most perfect in the world? Ah! When I fancied you a Princess, I was submissive, tender, and impassioned. Good Heavens! and when you told me 'I am poor, I am a felon's daughter,' I became stern, imperious, and cruel. I threatened you."

'But you pitied me too," Susannah softly interrupted him, 'and now you love me; you tell me so. What matter the rest?"

Brian attempted to reply, but she laid a finger on his lip.

"We must make haste," she said, in a whisper. "Do you not wish to know the danger to which you alluded just now?"

"I want to know your whole life," Brian answered; "I want to hear you speak of yourself, to know how far I am guilty."

"Why did you interrupt me just now?" the lovely girl asked with a smile. "I wanted to tell you all. Instead of listening, you cross-questioned me; you asked me were I worthy of your love. Oh, Brian! could I answer—I, who do not believe that there is a woman in the world worthy of you?"

Lancaster became sad, and bowed his head; he repented his suspicions as a crime. His coldness, henceforth heated to exultation, gave his love a peculiar delicacy.

"I will not interrupt you again," he said, with a look in which passion was altered to enthusiastic respect.

"Let us make haste, then," Susannah continued; "the espionage that surrounds me has momentarily ceased; for, had we been overheard, the vengeance of the men who treat me as a slave would not have been deferred so long. I will first tell you my life, Brian—my whole life. I will then tell you what I know about this powerful and mysterious association, whose might surrounds and might crush us."

In the black closet, the little Frenchwoman was sleeping in the warm wadding of her satin wrapper. She still dreamed that she was fidelity itself.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### A KISS IN ONE'S SLEEP

"THERE was behind my father's house," said Susannah, "a small garden, in which grew twelve splendid oaks, like those in the royal parks. There was nothing else.

"I was very young. As far as my memory can go back, I see myself playing on the lawn at the foot of the trees, which, planted in a circle, hid the surrounding houses, and only allowed me to perceive the grey London sky, and at times the sun, often rendered purple by the fog.

"I never went out. The only persons in the house were my father, a woman called Temperance, who was intoxicated from morning till night, and a man-servant of the name of Rehoboam, who was dumb. Temperance acted as my tire-woman, or nurse; she was forbidden from chatting with me, and my father once threatened to kill her without mercy, because, in her intoxication, she had said a few strange words to me, whose obscure meaning my young mind did not catch.

"But the words themselves have remained in my mind. She alluded to a cruel and wicked Earl, who had deserted his daughter, and a poor woman who was lamenting her child on the other side of the Clyde.

"Temperance never tried it again, my father so terrified her; whenever she saw him she trembled like a leaf, and her cheeks, reddened by gin, turned pale. Her labours were limited to dressing me and setting in motion the swing in which I remained

for hours under the oak trees. The rest of the day she drank or slept. I believe that she was a creature without malice, and quite capable of doing a good action.

"Rehoboam waited at table. His dumbness was not a natural infirmity, for he bore on his face traces of a barbarous mutilation, such as I noticed at a later date in the East among the wretches the Mussulmans employ for their secret sacrifices. He was a slave; my father beat him, and he was the cause of my father being hanged.

"You know my father, for I often saw you at our house; but you did not come till many years after the period to which I am alluding. Israels Spencer, as the Gentiles called him, was at that time a young man. I cannot think of him without a feeling of terror. I still fancy I see his piercing eyes fixed on me with their expression of indefinable mockery. He did not love me, though he at times gave me a smile as he passed, and spent long hours in describing to me the intoxicating delights of Oriental manners, and teaching me that the duty of a woman is to obey and charm.

"I loved him as I did Temperance; and I pitied Rehoboam, the poor dumb man. My father at times did not see me for three or four days; it was not because he was absent, but he remained in another part of the house, which I was not allowed to enter. I remained alone with Temperance and Rehoboam. The latter cut small pieces of hard wood, whose destination I learned at a later date. Temperance drank gin till she fell a lifeless mass on the carpet.

"I ran about under the trees with my fawn. I have not told you, Brian, of my fawn—my Corah, so gentle, so beautiful, and which loved me so dearly. My father brought it into our garden, and Rehoboam built it a house. I was very frightened at first, but Rehoboam pushed me towards it, and Corah lay down so gracefully at my feet, that I ventured to pat her. Corah licked my hand. It was the first time in my life that I received a caress. I was happier than I had ever been before; I threw my arms round Corah's neck, and kissed her tawny cheek with transport.

"My father began laughing, and his laugh chilled me to the marrow.

"'This will be your companion in future, Sukey,' he said; 'it will never leave the garden again, and you will find it an affectionate creature.'

"I became sad. Whence came this pretty creature, shut up in my prison? It seemed confined between the walls of the

garden, for it ran up and down as if seeking an issue. Doubtless it was yesterday as free as the little girls I had seen passing along the street.

'My father left the garden, and Corah lay down at my feet again. I spoke to her as if she could understand me; she could not answer me, dear Brian, but she could weep. At the moment when the sun sank behind our wall, she got up, uttered a groan, and raised her head as high as she could, to inhale the outer air. Large tears coursed down her smooth cheeks.

"All that night, instead of sleeping, I thought of things I could obtain; of the outer world of liberty, whose name I was ignorant of, but which I vaguely comprehended as full of unknown delights. Then, when sleep came, I dreamt that I was playing in a splendid park with girls I loved, and who loved me."

Susannah stopped pensively. Brian, who had hitherto listened in dumb amazement, profited by this moment of silence.

"It appears you did not know your mother, Susannah?" he asked.

"No," was the answer. "When my father spoke to me about her, it was to exhort me to hate her."

Brian gave a start of surprise. "Hate your mother?" he repeated; but you have surely some more distinct recollections than your father's words?"

"No," she answered.

"Were there no women about your cradle?"

"Only Temperance, who drank and slept,"

"And what age were you at the time of which you are speaking?"

"I do not know. It was ten years ago, and I believe that I am eighteen."

Lancaster was silent; Susannah reflected for a moment, but then her face was lit up by a glow of happiness, and she suddenly continued—

"Let me tell you of a mysterious event which at this time interrupted the monotony of my seclusion. It was, perhaps, a dream—my father and Temperance often told me it was. But if it were a dream, I have never had so sweet a one since, and each of the incidents is engraved on my heart. Whenever I desired to be happy, I would close my eyes and recall in thought this dream, or reminiscence.

"It was one evening, and Israels had not been to the part of

the house in which I lived for two days. I was in the parlour asleep, with my head on Corah's shoulder. When I slept thus, the fawn would remain motionless for hours, and not stir till I awoke. This time, however, it made a movement which caused me to raise my eyelids; and I saw—whether sleeping or waking, I know not—a female glide into the parlour, followed by Temperance.

"How lovely this lady was! and what good was there on her gentle face! My heart bounded towards her directly I saw her; but I dared not stir, through my childish shyness, which was heightened by continual solitude. I kept my eyes half-closed, and feigned sleep.

"Temperance and the beautiful lady stopped in the middle of the parlour. Corah's flanks quivered under me, because she was wild too, and was frightened at the sight of a stranger. Was I not too young, Brian, to invent such details? Temperance and my father deceived me. I saw that lady; I felt Corah quiver; it was not a dream!"

Susannah raised her eyes, and fixed them on Brian's face.

"How you would have loved a mother!" he said, with emotion.

"You think, then, it was a dream?" the girl asked sorrowfully.

"I think that Heaven has been merciful to me, and that I did not deserve your love. Pray go on, and tell me your life. I am beginning to comprehend what you are; I am beginning to see through the mysterious and divine operation which caused an angel to grow up where infernal seed had been sown."

"Alas!" Susannah said, with a shake of her head, "you forget that I am a wretched slave in the hands of perverse and powerful people—an instrument for working evil."

Brian took her hand in an affectionate manner and interrupted her with a smile.

"You are a poor deluded child," he said. "We are in London, where any hidden and almost magical power like that of which you have vaguely spoken is out of the question. These people wish to employ you for a purpose I am ignorant of, but which we shall detect—that is the whole trick; but it was your ignorance that made them strong."

"Take care; I have seen things——"

"You will tell me all about it, Susannah," Brian went on; "besides," he added, in that soothing tone we employ to cure children of their chimerical fears. "if they are giants, we will

overthrow them; and if they are demons, we will try to exorcise them."

He rose, opened in turn the two doors of the boudoir, and convinced himself that the adjoining rooms were empty.

"And, in the first place," he said, as he returned to her side, "do not any longer fear those fanciful spies who terrify you so much; it is only in old books that we read of walls having ears."

Susannah did not appear entirely to share his confidence; still, the very fact of having been able to speak so freely for the greater part of an hour proved to her that the watch upon her was relaxing. She continued—

"You cannot believe, Brian, how glad I should be to be able to think that this sweet lady, with her benevolent and gentle air, was not a vision. It is the only happy reminiscence I have retained of my childhood.

"She gazed on me with delight, 'How pretty she is!' she said, with an air at once sad and joyful.

"Temperance, extraordinary to say, had not been drinking that evening.

"'Madam, she is your very image!' she said.

"Footsteps were audible at the end of the passage on which the parlour opened. 'Begone, Madam, begone!' Temperance exclaimed, turning pale in spite of the purple tinge gin had imparted to her cheek—'begone!'

"The lady made a movement to retire, but something restrained her, and repulsing the efforts of Temperance, who tried to drag her away, she rushed forward and pressed me convulsively to her heart. Oh! it could not be a dream, for see, Brian, I weep at the mere thought of that kiss—the only gentle one I ever felt on my forehead. Oh, yes, you are right; how I should have loved my mother, Brian."

"It was she!" Lancaster exclaimed, "it was your mother, who was doubtless kept away from you by force."

Susannah clasped her hands, and passionately looked up to Heaven.

"My mother!" she repeated, as if the word left a pleasant taste on her lips in its passage—"my mother! Do you, too, believe I have seen my mother?"

She slipped off the sofa on to her knees.

"Oh, Heaven!" she murmured, "grant that she is happy—very happy, and that before dying, I may once again feel my mother's lips on my forehead."

"My life is yours, Susannah," Lancaster said, as he raised her; "the time I used to give to my vengeance or my follies I will henceforth bestow unreservedly on you. We will seek, and if it be possible to find your mother, we will do so."

She turned to him her tear-laden eyes, as if suffering from some passing emotion,

"God hears my prayer," she said, "since He grants me your aid, Brian. Tell me again that we shall find her, and it will make me very happy."

"On my honour, I will try to do so; and meanwhile, we will speak about her. We will lay aside all your painful recollections only to think of that blessed memory and the hope it causes to spring up."

"Oh, how kind you are, Brian!" Susannah said, her moistened eyes displaying unbounded gratitude; "yes, we will speak of her —we will seek her."

She uttered the last word with an effort, and then was silent, losing the smile that sparkled beneath her tears. Her eyes suddenly dried and became burning, as if affected by some passing emotion.

"No, no," she continued with bitter discouragement; "you are leading me to form wild illusions. Do I not know for certain that I have no mother? The truth comes back, Brian, the truth that renders me despairing. It was only a dream!"

"I cannot believe——" Brian began.

"Listen! When those kind lips touched my forehead, I uttered a cry of joy, and held out my little arms to return kiss for kiss. Alas! my arms embraced empty space. There was no lovely lady bending over to kiss me. I opened my eyes, and the room was in profound darkness. I certainly heard a furtive step departing, but it must have been Temperance's.

"Almost immediately my father's threatening voice was audible. I could not understand what he said, for he was speaking to Temperance in an unknown tongue. I have learned since that it was the dialect of Western Ireland. Temperance replied in a trembling voice, and Israels continued his menaces. At last the poor girl uttered piercing cries, and between them I could hear my father's hand fall several times heavily upon her.

"When the lights were lit, I saw Temperance on the floor, with a bleeding and swollen face. Israels frequently beat her

thus. I went up to console her, but my father roughly repulsed me.

"'Have you had a nice sleep, Sukey?' he asked.

"'I was not asleep, sir,' I answered, 'and I saw——'

"'Tell me your dream another time, Sukey, but do not sleep again on the floor; the nights are cold, and, as you see, you are the cause of my being obliged to chastise Temperance.'

"'What!' I exclaimed; 'it was on my account?'

"'Listen, Sukey,' Israels continued, with an ugly smile—for when he smiled, Brian, I always felt frightened—'listen. Do not go to sleep again in the parlour, my child; and when you have dreams of that sort, come at once and tell them to me. Will you do so, Sukey?'

"A question from my father was always an order or a threat. I bowed my head, and began trembling.

"'Will you do it?' Israels repeated, shaking me by the arm.

"'I will, sir.'

"'Yes, Sukey, you are a good girl; and besides, if you do not do it, I will kill your fawn.'

"This threat contracted my heart, and aroused in me an indignation beyond my fears. I had no one in the world to love me but my poor Corah. For the first time, I looked Israels in the face, and his frown did not compel me to lower my eyes.

"'If you attempt to kill Corah, I will defend her,' I replied.

"He tapped me gently on the cheek. 'What's bred in the bone,' he muttered to himself.

"'Sukey,' he added, resuming his seriousness, 'if you attempt to defend your fawn when I mean to kill her, I will cut both your throats.'

"When he left the room, I went up to Temperance, who still lay on the floor, and tried to raise her, but soon found it impossible to do so.

"'Gin!' she said to me, in her hoarse and broken voice; 'bring me some gin.'

"I went to fetch some, and she drank it greedily. After doing so, she began to sing. I asked fervently, and on my knees, who the lovely lady was who had bent over me and kissed me. See burst into a laugh and drank again; then, instead of getting up, she lay down her full length, saying—

"'The Jew beats me, but he lets me drink; what do I care for blows when I have gin.'

"'Temperance, my good Temperance!' I exclaimed, 'answer me, for pity's sake.'

"'When I have gin, I don't fear blows,' she repeated, 'Let the Jew beat me, and I will drink.'"

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### CORAH

"MANY times after that day," Susannah continued, "I questioned Temperance. When not intoxicated, she listened to me trembling, and would not answer me; when she had been drinking, she looked at me with her stupid laugh and sang. I was not allowed to sleep in the parlour again.

"The days passed away, then months and years. I grew up, and my father said that I was becoming beautiful. No change, however, took place in my life; I still remained confined in our house, with no other companions but the dumb Rehoboam, Temperance, and my fawn. My father's absence became more and more frequent, and I hardly ever saw him. I have known since what he did while away. He was staking his life against gold. At the outset he gained a good deal of money; but when luck turned, he lost his life.

"How I wept, Brian, at the period of which I am speaking. For nearly two years poor Corah and I had loved each other. If you only knew how grateful and gentle she was—how she understood every word that passed my lips, and interpreted my silence. She was my only friend and my sole delight. When I smiled, she bounded wildly on the turf around me; when I was sad—and I was often so—she would be at my feet, fix her large eyes on me, and bleat gently. When she was dead, it was long ere I found another living creature to take compassion on me.

"For she did die. Corah was not like me, the daughter of misfortune: she had known liberty, her supple though apparently frail limbs had formerly devoured space. She had been sought

in the solitude of the forests, to be imprisoned in the confined garden, which had not sufficient air for her open chest; the poor wild creature pined away, because there was a wall between her and the horizon—because her wide expanded nostrils could no longer inhale the odorous breeze that blew over the tall grass—because she was deprived of everything—wholesome fatigue, and movement, and sunshine.

"At night, at the hour when the damp and cold night air brings down on the ground the stifling breath of the myriad London chimneys, Corah began to breathe with difficulty; she panted, and then lost breath. The first beams of the morning sun restored her a little life; but the sun is very rare in London, and when it is absent, a cloak of mourning is spread over the city.

"I, too, was something like Corah: the heavy air of my prison oppressed my chest more and more. But I found a gloomy joy in this new misfortune; I hoped to die, but death did not come; I was too strong. One morning, on going down into the garden, I found my poor Corah stretched out on the grass; she was breathing painfully, and her breast heaved with convulsive sobs. My limbs gave way beneath me, for I guessed the truth. I knelt down by Corah's side, the heavy tears silently coursing down my cheeks. She fixed her fading eye on me, and tried to rise and give me her usual kiss; she fell back, and all was over—Corah never got up again."

Brian took the lovely girl's embroidered handkerchief and wiped away the tears that slowly ran down her cheeks. She tried to smile.

"It was very sad, was it not?" she continued. "But after that death, I must leap over seven years to find again a friendly glance, or a sincere smile. Seven years, Brian! and I am yet young. For the last week Heaven has overwhelmed me. It has sent to me the man I love, and an angelic woman who calls me her sister; so, whatever may happen, I shall not complain again. You have loved me for a week, and the Countess of Lancewood has granted me room in her heart.

"I remained the whole day by the side of my dead Corah. It was in vain that they tried to drag me away—I wished to die too. At nightfall a frightful thing occurred. Temperance brought a man into the garden; he was hideous to look upon, deformed, and clothed in rags. Temperance said to me—

"'Miss Susannah, here's Bob, the jolly beggar, come to fetch the fawn. You must go up to your bedroom, or you will be il

"I did not stir, but the hideous beggar came towards me, and, struck with invincible disgust, I rushed into the parlour. Both the beggar and Temperance remained alone with my poor Corah.

"'Come, my darling Bob,' said Temperance, 'take it on your shoulders.'

"Bob knelt down at the same spot where I had been a moment previously, and ran his hand over my fawn's body.

"'It is precious thin,' he growled; 'but if it had died of a knife, it would have been worth thirty shillings.'

"I heard and shuddered.

"'Such as it is, I sell it to you for a bottle of gin,' Temperance went on; 'but make haste, Bob.'

"'Gin,' Bob scolded; 'always gin! A woman of five-foot-six! Hark you, Temperance, I will stand a bottle of ginger-beer; the little animal is not worth more.'

"'Done for the ginger-beer,' said Temperance; 'but make haste.'

"Bob thrust his hand in his bag, and drew out a long knife, whose blade glistened in the last beams of daylight.

"'Before or after,' he said, 'it makes but little odds. It would be a sin to lose so many pounds of good meat; I will arrange it so well, that the dealer will believe that I killed it before death.'

"I heard him give a shrill laugh, and then the blade of his knife disappeared in Corah's throat.

"A cry of horror burst from me, and I fell to the ground. When I regained my senses, my father was standing at my bedside with a physician.

"'You must take care of this child, sir,' the latter said; 'she is ill, very ill. She requires air and liberty—the recreations of her age, or else——'

"He did not conclude the sentence, but I understood him, and had hope.

"'Do you think we have reached that point?' Israels replied; she is strong and handsome; it is the effect of a passing sorrow. I will get her another fawn, and her grief will disappear.'

"The physician shook his head, and took from the mantelpiece a geranium, whose faded flowers were hanging listlessly from the stalk.

"'Flowers and children require air and sunshine,' he said; 'here is a poor plant that will be dead to morrow. Take my ad-

vice, sir; give pure air to your daughter's weary lungs, or she will fare like this flower.'

"The physician bowed, and left the room. I had pretended to be asleep during the whole interview; when my father was alone, he sat down and felt my pulse.

"'Those scamps of doctors are becoming political,' he muttered angrily. 'Flowers and children! But Susannah is really ill. By the beard of Jacob, I would sooner make a sacrifice than lose her, for she is my fortune. In one way or another, I shall derive a handsome income from her, and that without any risk.'

"On the morrow he had me placed in a close carriage, which travelled all day without stopping. When I got out it was night, and the next morning I awoke in a large room, in which the rising sun poured its beams. I leaped from my bed and ran to the window. My eyes filled with tears, for I saw before me a vast horizon—woods, a lake, and mountains. Over the whole scene the oblique rays of the sun glided, casting a golden hue over portions. It was very beautiful—so beautiful, that I forgot my poor Corah. But her image soon returned to harass my mind. I saw her lying under the tall trees, bounding along by the lake, or lying in the grass; and I wept again, but not for joy.

"But I was a child, after all. All these things, so beautiful and so novel for me, overcame my regrets. I remembered Corah. I still remembered her as the only being that cast some sweetness over the gloomy solitude in which my childhood was spent, and yet, both then and now, this reminiscence lost its first bitterness. I always fancied Corah lying at my feet; and licking my hand, which offered her bread; but I never saw her dying, and I forgot the knife of Bob, the horrible beggar.

"The place to which I had been brought was a long distance from London. That is all I can say, as I never knew its name or locality. I was allowed to go out as much as I pleased, but I was prohibited from speaking to strangers, and Temperance was always my sole companion. My father had remained in London. Lady Ophelia and you, Brian, have spoken to me of God during the last week, and the Countess has lent me a book, in which high and consoling words are written. At that time I did not know God, and His name had only reached my ears in some blasphemy of my father's, or the complaints of Temperance when she was beaten. I was ignorant of all that relates to religion. Alas! I yet am ignorant of many things; but still, at that time, when my childish intellect was plunged in deep gloom —at that time I felt something within me that inwardly led me

to a mysterious adoration, to a hope that was not of this world and whose object shone beyond death. It was a vague aspiration, more painful than consoling, because it was surrounded by efforts to understand, which could never lead to any result. I at times questioned Temperance, but she did not understand me, or pretended not to do so. On such occasions she would strike up a stupid song, or tell me that Israels would soon come to fetch me, and that then I would have silk and velvet dresses, pearls in my hair, and rings with precious stones on each of my fingers. I understood that, for I was not entirely ignorant of things that were bad or frivolous. Israels had told me to satiety that I was beautiful, and had frequently surrounded me with luxuries, as if to heighten my growing coquetry.

"I had left London in the early part of spring, and I was left at the country house during the whole of the fine season. These eight months of comparative liberty produced an extraordinary effect upon me. I had been strong before I left, and it required to crush me, all the pressure of my solitude in the impure atmosphere of London. In the country I became suddenly developed; my body was robust, my heart acquired strength, and my intellect, though still uncultivated, took some bold glances beyond the barrier built up round me, at that world which I was not permitted to know.

"I learned to ride, to swim in the lake, and Rehoboam was often astonished at the skill with which I used the light fowling piece which Israels had placed among my luggage. Alas! Brian, those are not the things a woman should know. I have learned, during the last week, that such acquirements injure a lady. I will forget them, as I wish to please you."

Lancaster bowed with a smile. "Not at all! Forget nothing, Susannah," he said; "I love you as you are. I love all that is in you—your ignorance, and even that tyranny which oppressed your youth, and made you so different from other girls. Oh! did you love me, we should be very happy."

"Love you!" Susannah repeated, a flash starting from her eyes, which had been dimmed by her recollections, "Heaven knows that my life has long been yours: but I will soon tell you what I suffered without you, and for you, who did not know me. I will tell you how, unconsciously, you changed my apathetic resignation into agony, my gloomy indifference into martyrdom. And I will also tell you, Brian, how greatly I loved my suffering itself, and what strange delight was blended with the bitterness of my torture.

"Toward autumn a letter from my father recalled me. We

again entered a close carriage, which reached London at night.

"I no longer envied the girls playing in the square, and besides, they were no longer the same; those, whose noisy sports I had formerly longed to share, had grown up like myself. Now what were they doing? Perhaps they were shut up too, poor girls!

"I took pity on their end, and said to myself that they would suffer the same fate as my poor Corah, for they were prisoners after having been free. On seeing me again, my father seemed surprised.

"'How tall and lovely you are, Susannah!' he said, with real admiration; 'that doctor was right with his apologue of the flower and the child. Come, my pet, you are a lady now, and must be treated accordingly. Are you fond of handsome dresses?'

"I blushed with pleasure at the question.

"'You shall have smart dresses,' my father continued, with mockery in his smile, 'and lace and jewellery; and you will soon see fresh faces too, my girl. You will amuse yourself like a queen, Susannah!'

"On the evening of that very day an event occurred. Temperance was engaged in undoing my hair before I went to bed. As usual, the wretched girl smelt of gin enough to make my heart heave.

"'Miss Susannah,' she suddenly said, bursting into a laugh, 'I have been ordered to buss you—on both cheeks, by the Lord! There, I have committed a sin, my dear young lady. The Bible says, "Thou shall not take the name of the Lord in vain:" but my pretty Bob teaches me to swear. What was I saying, Miss Susannah, if you please?'

"'That drinking is a great fault, Temperance,' I replied, with girlish malice.

"'Did I say that?' she exclaimed. 'Hang it then, I must be drunk. But no, you naughty girl, I was saying that I had been ordered to buss you, and hang this ornament round your neck.'

"Before I had time to answer, she kissed both my cheeks, and passed round my neck a silken cord from which hung the locket in which our flower now is, Brian.

"'What is this?' I exclaimed, 'and who ordered you—?'

"'Silence!' Temperance interrupted me, 'it is a great secret.'

"'Pray, my good Temperance, tell me who sent this pretty box?'

"'It is a fairy,' she continued, with her coarse gaiety—'a fairy who prowls round the square every night, and gives me money to buy gin when—when she thinks proper, by George, Miss Susannah.'"

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### THE LOCKET.

"It was impossible for me," Susannah continued, "to obtain any further information from Temperance, who ran off, as she said, to fetch the half-pint the fairy had given her. She left me the locket hung round my neck, which I turned over and over, admiring the delicacy of the workmanship. Where these confused scratches are now, there was a coat of arms engraved with extreme delicacy. Below the shield, a word had been traced with a pin point by a trembling hand.

"I could not read at that time, Brian, dearest; I could not decipher a word, but each of the letters composing it was engraved on my memory, and at a later date I was able to read them there. The word written beneath the shield was a name—that name was Mary, so far as an impression of that nature can attain to certainty."

"Mary!" Brian repeated, as if ransacking his memory.

For an instant he seemed to be continuing his search, but then added, quickly—

"But Mary is so common, and besides, I may be mistaken," Susannah remarked, "for the name or the word remained but a very short time before my eyes."

Lancaster, however, reflected; an idea had vaguely sprung up in his mind. He bent over the locket, which he examined minutely, as if wishing to trace the original engraving under the scratches; but who was ever able to see the same face twice recurring in the clouds? In the confusion and entanglement of a thousand lines, formed accidentally one over the other, the mind

per eives everything, and yet nothing. Lancaster sought in vain the two eagles he had recognised on either side the shield: these supporters now seemed to be griffins. The Earl's coronet alone remained visible, bearing the coat of arms,

"And it was your father who destroyed this engraving?" he asked.

"I was going to tell you," Susannah went on. "During the entire evening I occupied myself with looking at my locket. I knew not why I already valued it more that all my other playthings. I formed an involunta y and mysterious connexion between this present made by a strange hand, and the vision I have told you of. It must have been the same person."

"Did you think of your mother, Susannah?"

The Jewess bowed her head. "Brian," she said, "I thought of a gentle, lovely lady, who loved me. I did not think of my mother, because I believed that she had deserted me. No, Brian, I am bound to tell you, that the thought of my mother only aroused painful feelings in me. My father had told me so many times."

"Your father," interrupted the gentleman, bitterly, and yet compassionately, "wishe i to mutilate your heart, and efface filial love, as he did the marks and word engraved on this locket. He was unable to succeed. May the Father of all forgive him!"

"Yes, indeed, may our Father forgive him if such were his plan; for, amid the cruel recollections that form my entire past, the bitterest and most cruel is, that I often reproached my mother.

"I was still looking at my locket when Israels came to pay me his evening visit. I tried to hide it in my bosom, but he noticed the movement, and seized my arm.

"Soho," he exclaimed, "so, Miss Sukey, we already know the road to our bosom—that hiding-place not generally employed at your age. Show me that, my child. It can hardly be a love letter, eh?'

"'Do not take it from me, sir,' I cried; 'pray, do not take it from me.'

"'We are very fond of it, are we? P'shaw! I will return it to you, but you must show it me at once.'

"He said this with that tone of imperious mockery which, for my misfortune, I was rarely able to resist. You remember Israels, do you not? but no, he never could order you about, and his features always retained the obsequious expression of the discounter to you.

"At home he was a terrible man; I fancy I can still see his

pale face, the lower part of which was concealed by a thick black, silky beard, and only separated from his hair by his prominent cheek-bones and his narrow forehead, the greater part of which was covered by jet-black brows. Temperance used to say that he was handsome ; at any rate, his was a terrifying beauty.

"And what a voice! How deep, mocking, and menacing it was! I have since heard a similar voice, Brian, a voice which, the first time I heard it at my ear, stopped the circulation of my blood and froze my very marrow. It was a man's voice, too."

Susannah lowered her voice, and huddled nearer to Brian.

"It was the voice of the man now my master," she added.

The hearer's attention was redoubled as Susannah continued—

"It is not yet time to talk of him, though I will merely tell you a strange fact. This man, who made himself known to me by the name of Tyrrel, and whom the Countess calls Sir Edmund Mackenzie——"

"Sir Edmund," Lancaster exclaimed, "can he be——?"

"Do you know him?"

"Of course I do. What were you going to tell me about him?"

"I was going to tell you—but you will be able to judge whether I am in error or no, since you know him—I was going to tell you that his voice once produced an extraordinary effect on me. I had heard him speak before, and have done so since, and it seems to me as if his voice is usually disguised, while that time, and that time alone, he spoke naturally, angrily, passionately, and his voice became that of Israels'."

Lancaster smiled with an air of doubt.

"I am mistaken, you mean?" Susannah continued: "that is very possible. My situation on that day may have materially contributed to my error, for I found myself once more under the tyrannical will of a man who said to me, 'Do so and so,' and I was obliged to act contrary to my heart and conscience. Oh! it was a painful moment," the girl added, as a bitter thought crossed her mind. "There was a dying man asleep, and I was told to kiss his forehead. I did so, Brian, because I was threatened with the loss of you. Heaven grant that no harm resulted from it!"

Her confidant looked at her anxiously.

"Your words are becoming enigmas for me. In Heaven's name explain yourself."

"Very shortly I will. Before coming to these sad episodes, there are others equally sad to narrate to you. I spoke to you about Tyrrel because his voice—and now that I think of it, my

heart contracts again—oh! it was his voice—it was Israels' voice!"

Susannah, while uttering the last words, placed her hands before her eyes, as if repulsing some frightful vision.

"My dear Susie," Lancaster said, soothingly, "sufficient real misfortunes have weighed and still weigh on your life, though it is so short, to check you from lurking phantoms. What is there in common between Tyrrel's harmless countenance and the energetically wicked face of the Jew Israels? The blind man's insignificant features may only be a mask, as you say he is mixed up in the dark intrigues that surround you; but Israels would have attempted in vain to put such a mask on his peculiar features. Everything about them is different, even contrary. Besides, must I remind you that Israels is dead?"

"On the scaffold, yea!" Susannah murmured, "I know it, I saw it. Yes, I myself saw my father hung, Brian!"

She stopped, trembling and suffocated, and a few moments passed ere she spoke again. Brian, during this time, thought of Tyrrel, whose affliction he had hitherto deplored, and yet who, according to Susannah, proved to be the active head of a criminal and mysterious enterprise. He knew not yet what its object might be, but he was already reflecting on the means by which to tear the mask from this man, who abused his infirmity and deceived the more easily because he was pitied, and compassion closed the door against suspicion. This was very dangerous for Tyrrel, for the position held in the world by Brian Lancaster rendered him a most dangerous foe to contend with.

"I told you," Susannah continued, shaking off the heavy weight which the horror of the recently recalled scene had produced on her mind, "that my father peremptorily ordered me to give him the object concealed in my bosom. I was obliged to obey, however great my reluctance to part with the locket might be. He took it, and so soon as his eyes rested on the word and the armorial bearings, an angry exclamation burst from him.

"'Wretch of a Temperance!' he muttered, 'there is no placing any confidence in her. Who gave you this jewel, Miss?

"I did not answer.

"'It is very pretty, my girl,' he continued. 'Will you make me a present of it?'

"'No, sir!' I exclaimed; 'leave it with me, I implore you to let me keep it.'

"'I will do so, Sukey, if you are a good girl; that is to say, if you confess that it was Temperance who gave it to you.'

"There is implanted in us an instinctive hatred of falsehood; for even I, ignorant in this matter as in so many others, found the greatest difficulty in telling my first untruth. But I knew that my father would beat Temperance, and I took pity on her.

"'No, sir,' I replied, with embarrassment, 'it was not Temperance.'

"'Could it be Rehoboam?' he asked, turning pale.

"'No, sir.'

"This answer came from my heart. Israels looked at me with a scowl.

"'She knows how to lie already,' he muttered with a crafty smile. 'I'll wager that her education will not be difficult or take long. That's enough, Sukey,' he added aloud; 'I know all I wanted to know, and will return you your locket.'

"He sat down by my side, turning over the locket in his fingers, as if wishing to open it. For my part, I had not even suspected that it was hollow. After a few minutes, during which he conversed with me about trifling matters, his finger accidentally touched the spring, and the locket flew open. I uttered a cry of surprise.

"'Ha! ha! Sukey,' he said, 'so you did not expect that?'

"'What is there in it?' I asked, curiously.

"'A drop of scent, Miss Susannah, and a few cat's hairs.'

"While uttering these words, which he accompanied by a dry, forced laugh, he walked up to the grate, where coal was smouldering, and threw upon them an object he had taken out of the locket. It sparkled on touching the coke, caught fire at once, and emitted a dense smoke. It must have been a lock of hair.

"'Oh, sir!' I exclaimed, 'you promised to return me——'

"'Silence, Miss Sukey,' he interrupted me; 'we sons of Abraham keep all our promises, mark you.'

"He had taken from the locket a very small piece of thin paper that accompanied the hair. He put his glass in his eye, and read:—

"'For Susannah, when she knows how to read.'

"'Good!" he exclaimed 'this is exquisitely nice scruples. Of course, Sukey, you will not think of reading till you have learned your alphabet?'

"'I will learn, sir,' I replied. 'That paper is mine, so return it to me.'

"'You will learn, Sukey, that is true; you will begin to-morrow to learn how to read, sing, and dance; you will learn all that a pretty girl requires to captivate a man's heart. As for reading

this paper, that is another matter. Do not trouble yourself about it, but let me decipher this scrawl.'

"He began to read the note enclosed in the locket. The paper was very small; still, it doubtless contained a good many th ngs, for my father was a long time in reading it. While doing so, he muttered bittter remarks, and shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"'Very fine indeed!' he at length exclaimed. There is, by the knife of Abraham, enough in this scrawl to make a brigade of old women burst into tears. If the person who writes you this trash, Sukey, were rich, I believe that we could come to an arrangement, for money is no object, it appears.'

"'Who is the person, sir?' I asked, in an imploring tone, 'and what am I asked to do?'

"'The person wants your company, Miss Sukey, that is all. As for the name, it is written here at full length.' He pointed to the word scratched under the coat of arms. 'What a pity it is that dou have not yet taken your first reading lesson!'

"'What is the name?' I asked again.

"'It is the name——'

"He hesitated, but then continued—

"'Of a handsome young man, who is dying of love for you, Sukey. His first name is Henry, which does not much enlighten anybody like you.'

"I did not at all understand this answer, as you may easily suppose. For a girl to know, at the age of eleven and a half, what love is, she must have listened at doors, or associated with servants."

"And it was Israels who spoke thus to you!" Lancaster said, with a frown—"your father!"

"I think that it was very wrong, since the words appear to excite your indignation; but Israels went further. That evening he pronounced, for the first time in my presence, words that at first glanced off the buckler of my ignorance, but which, frequently repeated and patiently explained, eventually penetrated my mind. A week ago I could have repeated to you, without a blush, all that Israels taught me, because I believed that his lessons were such as every father gives his daughters. But during the last week I have been enlightened. I know that such instruction is infamous, and, in a father's mouth, attains the furthest limit of what is odious."

"What, Susie!" Brian exclaimed, would you have me suppose——"

"Silence, Brian!" she said, a noble and pure smile lighting up her sorrow, "do not question me. I will tell you all, whatever it may cost me; and tell you for the present that, in all matters that concern love, there is nothing in my life that I would wish to keep hidden from the world."

Lancaster felt himself blush, such a distance was there between his firm and dignified candour and the question he had been on the point of asking.

"Israels still held the locket in his hand," Susannah continued; he seemed to hesitate in restoring it to me. All at once he took from his pocket a tool like the one Rehoboam employed in carving the small pieces of wood, and suddenly sat down by my side. Then, with its help, he began effacing the coat of arms.

"'What are you doing, sir?' I asked him.

"'You can surely see, Sukey; but enough of that—let us talk of serious matters. I have a long lecture to give you, and I like "to work while preaching," as that follower of the Gentiles' Messiah advised. Listen to me carefully. You are a charming girl; and if you become what you promise to be, in two or three years—four at the latest—you will be the loveliest in London. Does that cause you pleasure?'

"'Oh, sir!' I answered with a sob, 'you are erasing the name of a person who loves me. What good will it do me to learn to read now?'

"'You are very anxious, it seems, to know this name, Susannah? If you are obedient, I will tell it you presently. And besides, my girl, in a short time you will count your lovers by dozens. On my word, you will be a happy creature, Sukey. I will lend you jewellery with which to outshine the most brilliant ladies. You shall be the Star of London Society, and a dense crowd of suitors will press round you. All will clamour for your heart. Are you listening to me, Sukey?'

"I sorrowfully watched the work of destruction which he pursued while speaking.

"'The duty of a woman——But here is your pearl of price, which I restore to you in accordance with my promise.'

"He then continued, almost in a solemn voice—

"'The duty of a woman is to love, Susannah—to love, and surrender herself, where her elders point, without reserve or struggling—you will understand that hereafter. But it is also her duty to except those beggarly adventurers who have nothing in the world but their face and their coat. She is bound to do

well if she chooses among the rich and generous. Good-bye till to-morrow, Sukey?'"

Her hearer remained as if petrified.

"Infamous! infamous!" he at length muttered

He rose, and walked up and down the room. When he returned to Susannah's side his face had grown calm again.

"Susannah," he said, with a tone of deep conviction, "that man—that monster—was not your father!"

Lancaster, in assuring Susannah that the Jew Israels was not her father, had no material proof of his assertion. The words he had uttered with so much conviction and warmth were but the outburst of an honest heart, refusing to believe in that height of shame—a father seeking to corrupt his daughter's mind. Susannah understood this; for she said nothing, but waited for some proof to support this sudden affirmation

"There are some things," continued the nobleman's son, answering Susannah's secret thoughts—"there are things we feel, but cannot prove. I feel, I know that this locket came from your mother. I know that this man cannot be your father. But to tell you how I know it is impossible."

Susannah raised the locket to her lips, and kissed it fervently.

"I wish to believe what you say about the myster ous origin of this locket. It will henceforth be doubly dear to me, as it will speak to me of all that I love—my mother and you. You have just taught me that I do not love you enough yet."

She fixed on Lancaster her glorious eyes, full of infinite gratitude and tenderness.

"As for Israels," she continued, "you are mistaken; he was certainly my father. But he was a man who, as far as I can judge from my recollections, combined with the slight experience acquired during the last few days, had ideas and principles very different from those of other men. He believed in nothing, he mocked at everything, and gave a contemptuous name to every virtue acknowledged by the world.

"After the conversation I have just described to you, Israels left me, but previously repeated that a new life would begin for me on the morrow. A few minutes after, I heard tears and cries in the passage, it was the voice of Temperance, who was thus expiating the crime of having given me your locket. Then there was a silence. Since that day I have never seen Temperance again, and I have often shuddered at the thought that perhaps——

"But I would sooner believe that my father turned her out; why should he have killed that unhappy, inoffensive creature?

"I have now arrived at another period of my history. My life suddenly altered without any transition. The next morning a strange woman assisted me to rise. My shyness urged me not to speak to her; but, on the other hand, I wished to ask after Temperance, and this desire, augmented by a vague anxiety as to the fate of the girl, was more powerful than my timidity.

"I addressed the new comer, who began smiling, and said a few words in a foreign tongue. She did not understand English. She at once began my toilette, and the clothes in which she dressed me were not those of the previous day. It was a handsome new dress, whose silken girdle imprisoned my waist, which had hitherto been free from all constraint. She smoothed and combed my hair in a novel fashion.

"When I looked at myself in the glass, after leaving the hands of this new waiting-maid, I uttered a cry of joy. For the first the consciousness of my beauty sprang up in me. I did not recognise myself: I blushed, I smiled, I was happy.

"That morning I was introduced into the drawing-room of our house, which I had never seen before. It was a large and magnificent apartment, hung with red velvet, and the walls covered with rare paintings.

"Heaven protected me in all this, Brian. So long as there was no barrier between Israels and me, so long as my mind remained defenceless against his perfidious suggestions, I was protected by my age; and then, at the moment when his teaching might have acted effectually on my senses, if not on my heart, you came—you, who were unconsciously my guardian angel!

"I remained for a moment alone in the room, and I must confess that I looked at myself a good many times in the glass. My new dress turned my head, and I would willingly have leaped for joy had I not experienced a feeling of timid anxiety at the thought of the strangers who were doubtless about to be introduced to me.

"'Bravo, Miss Sukey! very good!" my father exclaimed, who surprised me at the moment when I was trying to see my full length by means of the combined reflections of two mirrors. 'Very good, my pet, admire yourself. In a little time, please God, I trust there will be plenty of lords to look at you and admire you!'

"The shame of having been thus surprised—a natural shame, I think, which comes to us women independently of any lesson—brought a blush to my cheek.

"'Why blush, Sukey?' my father continued. 'What you are doing is quite proper, and you have no cause to blush. The first, the greatest, the sole merit of a woman is her beauty; why should she be prohibited from taking pride in it?'

"A person of obsequious mien, who had entered after Israels, and kept near the door, began smirking his approval.

"'You are right, my goot Mr. Spencer,' he said, with a respectful bow, 'and Miss Susannah is right too.'

"This man was a French Jew, who was to teach me to speak his language, and dance after the Parisian style. At the same time I was to learn German and Italian from Hebrew Professors belonging to those two countries, and they would also teach me music between them.

"Although I had not those strange motives that usually impel girls to study, I learned with very great ardour. At the end of a year, I knew French and other languages, I was beginning to sing and accompany myself on the harp or piano. I danced like a professional. I was exactly what my father might wish me to be in these various matters. One evening, when lessons were over, he came to me.

"'Sukey,' he said, 'to-night I offer bread and wine to my brothers: you owe them love and respect, for they are men after my own heart—skilful, bold, and clever in deceiving the foolish and wicked "outsiders." I am going to introduce you to them. Make yourself very charming, so that all my brothers may call me a happy father.'

"This was an order to which I could make no demur. Just as I was proceeding to my bedroom, he called me back, to ask, 'Would you not like to see Rehoboam again?'

"It was a year since I had seen the poor dumb man, who had been removed from me at the same time as Temperance. I had so few recollections, that each of them was dear to me. I revealed my gladness at the thought of seeing him again.

"'Come then,' said my father, as he took me by the hand.

"He opened a secret door in the wall, whose existence I had never suspected; he passed along a very narrow passage, lighted by a lamp, and came to a staircase as perpendicular as a ladder.

"On reaching the second floor, which must have been the third in the house, my father tapped gently at a low door, which immediately opened. Before entering, he looked at me with a smile, but this time there was terror beneath his raillery.

"'Sukey,' he said, in a tone at once impudent and bitter, 'this is my factory. I am going to let you into a secret, my

girl: the day after a man enters this room, your father, Israels Spencer, will be hanged.

"'What is being hanged?' I asked him.

"His smile deserted him, and a nervous contraction agitated his face.

"'It is a very amusing process,' he said, 'and I will let you see it performed some day.

## CHAPTER XLV.

### THE FACTORY.

SUSANNAH went on: "These words, which were fated to have, at a later date, such a terrible meaning both for him and me, made no impression on me at the time. Whence should I have derived a notion of the punishments inflicted by human justice when I had great difficulty in refraining from the belief that crime deserved a reward in this world?

"The room my father called his factory was a vast laboratory, in which the most heterogeneous objects were collected pell-mell. To the left, on entering, I saw, ranged in some order, a great number of different costumes and uniforms belonging to various armies.

"By the side of this table were pots of pomade of various hues, vials, false beards; and on a wig-block were the silky curls of a magnificent flaxen scalp, which looked as if it had been torn bodily from a man's head, so marvellously well was it imitated. Further on, in a case, was a number of tools, large and small, which I have since learned belonged to the locksmith's trade. Immediately behind the case came weapons: daggers of different shapes and sizes, pistols, and life-preservers.

"I walked by all this like a child in a public exhibition. I looked curiously, but without any emotion, at these things, the slightest of which had its peculiar value, and was adapted to some variety of crime. I know now for what they were employed, and you must not feel surprised at my knowledge, for I was present at Israels Spencer's trial. I saw all the articles from my father's factory brought one after the other into court, and a high official from *the* factory, as they call the police head-

quarters, I know not why, explained the use of each instrument. Each of them did its part in hanging my father.

"'How do you like all this, Sukey?' Israels asked me.

"'Oh, sir,' I exclaimed, 'there is a knife exactly like the one with which the beggar cut the throat of my poor Corah!'

"'Twelve hours after her death,' my father added, with a grin, 'I heard that spoken of. That rascal Bob is not one of the chosen, but he will make his way.'

"There were many other articles in my father's workshop, but I will pass to the immediate object of our visit. At the end of the room opposite the door, there was a bar, like those in public-houses. It formed a den, in which Rehoboam, the dumb man, was seated. How he had changed during a year! His fallen, hollow cheeks were covered with an untended and dirty beard: his hair had grown down to his shoulders. He looked like a sickly, worn-out old man. Captives must look the same after half a century of imprisonment. He raised his lack-lustre eye, and did not recognise me at first. Then he returned to his task, which I will explain to you presently.

"'Well, Rehoboam,' my father said to him, 'do you not recognise Miss Sukey?'

"The dumb man looked up with surprise; then he gave a growl of delight, and a soft smile crossed his ravaged features. He gave me a friendly, and at the same time respectful, bow.

"'My good Rehoboam,' I said to him, 'why do I never see you now?'

"He looked at my father in a timid way, that eloquently revealed the immense weight of slavery under which he was crushed. This look was twofold, like every slavish glance: I could distinguish a forced submission, and beneath it hatred.

"By what power Israels had been able to shut up this man, reduce his avarice to silence, and compel obedience, I never knew; but I have heard that strong and courageous men have frequently tamed lions and tigers, and forced them to obey their will.

"The following was Rehoboam's occupation in the workshop, which he had not left during a year. All around him, on the table that almost filled his den, were different slips of stamped paper, covered with writing. Here and there were engraving tools, inks of various shades, and those small carved pieces of hard wood to which I have already alluded.

"Rehoboam forged for my father bills on the principal mercantile houses in the City, or rather, he tried to counterfeit them, for the poor creature had not yet been able to produce

an imitation satisfactory to Israels; and Heaven knows how many rough and cruel beatings had resulted from these imperfect attempts.

"It was no easy task, however, and it was permissible to fail in this difficult criminal operation. There were more than one hundred signatures to counterfeit; he had to notice and reproduce minutely those thousand touches which commercial men, it appears, recognise at a glance, and which constitute the differences between the paper of the great houses.

"And Rehoboam tried, poor fellow! from morning till night he worked, retouching his dies, improving his stamps, and accustoming his hand to reproduce boldly, and at one stroke, the capricious turnings of a commercial flourish. After each attempt my father came to inspect the result, and he was a merciless inspector. His sharp eye detected the least defects; no fault, however slight it might be, could be excused.

"On such occasions Rehoboam fell asleep with the despair of a tame brute. He broke his tools, and lay at his full length in the dust of the workshop. My father took a stick and beat him, and went on, until Rehoboam, overcome by pain, rose and set to work again. That was why Rehoboam was pale, and his cheeks were like those of an old man.

"Assuredly the poor dumb man had been to me a strict guardian; but I could only think kindly of him, as I did of Temperance. Compared with the masters I had had during the last year, these two unhappy creatures had all the advantage. Both had evinced for me at times sympathy, if not affection. I have told you that I loved them. I offered him my hand, which he took, and pressed it to his lips. Then he pointed with a passionate gesture to the window, or rather, to the free air which was behind the window, and pantomimed the drawing of a deep breath.

"Poor Rehoboam!

"All was slavery and captivity in my father's house. The poor dumb man who had been my gaoler wore the chains in his turn. Israels bound thus all those whose services he wanted. At Rehoboam's gesture, so expressive and full of distress—at this gesture, which craved so energetically a little liberty—my eyes filled with tears. Israels shrugged his shoulders, and began laughing.

"'On my word, Sukey,' he said, 'you would play the part of the virtuous, persecuted heroine very decently at Drury Lane. That is no compliment, my dear, and we may, perhaps, have to launch you yet in a theatrical career. But we have not climbed

so many stairs merely to gush tenderly; and if that brute Rehoboam insists on breathing the fresh air, he need only dig a hole in the wall.'

"'Come, my boy, let us talk seriously; have you got on with your work to-day?'

"Rehoboam thrust his hand into a box standing behind his table, and withdrew it full of bills, which he handed to my father. The latter sat down, took out his glasses, and began the microscopic examination.

"It was pitiful to see Rehoboam follow with an anxious look each of my father's movements. His eye strove to read his fate on that unbending face. The poor wretch trembled at times; at others he contracted his thick eyebrows, as if an idea of resistance had crossed his mind. But the muscles of his face soon relaxed, and his eye lost even the anxiety that had formerly animated it. An expression of unbounded discouragement alone remained on his features.

"My father, in the meanwhile, had taken the bills one by one and carefully examined them.

"'Hang me if this tongueless rogue is not good for something after all; here is the signature of Dawes, Preeble and Son imitated with a master hand. You shall have a pint of sherry to-night, Rehoboam. Very good—very good indeed.'

"Rehoboam received these compliments unnoticed; he had only one feeling, that of fear. But no, I am mistaken: there was something else in Rehoboam; he hated, and hoped to avenge himself. My father laid half-a-dozen bills on one side, and returned the rest to Rehoboam.

"'That's better, Master Dummy,' he said, 'much better; you will be a first-rate hand in the end, and then you will be able to boast that you are the richest and happiest dumb man in the world. There is not a word to be said against Dawes, Preeble and Son, nor against Fauntler, of Thames Street, nor Davis, Blount and Davis, bankers to His Most Catholic Majesty in London. In the others there is room for improvement. A few months more of this work, and you will be the master of the City.

"He thrust into his pocket the half-dozen bills he had selected, and proceeded toward the door.

"'Good-by Rehoboam,' I said to the poor dumb man; 'I will come and see you again.'

"Rehoboam thrust his head out of his den to follow us as far as the door with a jealous look. We were at liberty, while he

had to remain fixed to his table. Although I was a prisoner myself, I quitted the room heart-broken.

"'Listen to me, Sukey,' my father said to me. 'In the same way as man is made to subdue animals deprived of reason, so among men vigorous minds must reign over weak and obtuse minds, and be their utter masters. You feel sorry for Rehoboam, and I blame you for it. In the first place, Sukey, believe me that compassion is a poor feeling, the least fault in which is its uselessness. Next, I am the master, he the slave. What do I care if he were to die over his task? He is replaceable. But enough about that nigger. Do not speak to any one about my factory. Those little papers you saw me handle are worth gold—a good deal of gold; but when a policeman touches or sees them, they are changed into deadly poison. Now, if you were to speak of that room, Sukey, the police would come and kill me.'

"We had descended the stairs, and found ourselves near the hidden door that opened into the drawing-room. I heard the sound of voices, and I hid myself timidly behind Israels. They were my father's guests conversing together while waiting for him. He ordered me to go and dress myself.

"When I came in again, adorned by the skilful hands of the French waiting-maid Israels had engaged for me, a murmur arose among the guests. These were twelve in number, and seated round a table covered with exquisite fare. I have rarely seen a collection of faces whose appearance was more respectable. My father was the youngest of all; the others had white or grizzly beards—those handsome beards that fall so majestically on the breasts of Oriental sages.

"I felt myself struck with respect at the sight of this imposing assemblage.

"'Sit down, Susannah,' my father said, kindly; 'eat and drink in the company of my brethren, who love you.'

"My timidity soon passed away, for the voices I heard were grave and gentle. All behaved with the most scrupulous delicacy, and the conversation did not turn on those subjects of which Israels was so fond, and to which I felt a vague antipathy. They spoke about trade, money, and now and then of the habits and customs of the strange countries they had visited.

"Footmen I had never seen before waited at table, and poured out the wine, which the guests, without exception, seemed to use very sparingly. But when the meats made room for the dessert, the footmen covered the table with decanters, and, at a

sign from Israels, disappeared, closing the doors after them. Then the scene changed. Some of the venerable beards, which had inspired me with such respect, fell off, and exposed the faces of young men. At the same time all their countenances changed, as if each had removed a mask.

"A murmur of relief ran round the table; Israels uncorked the bottles, and the glasses were filled to the brim. The voices grew louder, but the guests did not become riotous.

"'Well,' said Israels, 'what do you think of Susannah, my friends?'

"'Pretty,' said one.

"'Charming,' a second added.

"'Admirable,' a third said, 'especially when she blushes as she is doing now. You can make whatever you please of her, Israels.'

"'There is no doubt about that,' my father answered.

"'And what do you intend to do with her?' asked Eliazer, the merchant.

"'We must draw a distinction,' my father replied; 'I intend to do a good many things, one-half of which is my secret. The rest I can tell you.'

"'We are listening,' the guests said. The bottles went round, and Israels continued—

"'Do you not think that Susannah might pass for a Nobleman's daughter in any country?'

"'For a Prince's daughter,' exclaimed a young Jew of the name of Reuben, as he rapped the table with his empty glass.

"The others approved with a nod.

"'Well, brother' Israels continued, 'I intend ere long to turn nobleman, and Susannah will be one of the adjuncts of my disguise. Don't open your eyes so wide, friend Eliazer; I can speak out before Susannah, who has been properly trained.

"Each looked at me flatteringly, and Samuels, the broker, murmured something, as if he were calling down benedictions on my head.

"'That is one thing,' Israels added, tapping my cheek with the back of his hand, 'but it is not all. I require a Delilah to bring back the gamblers to my Tophet in Leicester Square.'

"'Is it not going on well?' Eliazer asked.

"'Very badly; a heathen has opened a sporting club in Coventry Street, only a few yards from mine. The gamblers visit that miscreant, because they find there decoys and music. And, moreover, people do not win very often at my table

"A universal burst of laughter greeted this remark.

"'That makes two ways in which Susannah will be useful to me,' my father went on; 'there is a third, which I need not explain to you in detail. Thank Heaven! there are still members of the upper classes who like to amuse themselves now and then, and I have no prejudices."

Another and noisier burst of laughter.

The perspiration stood between Lancaster's frowning eyebrows.

"Brian," Susannah continued, "all these men looked at me enviously, as if I were a piece of valuable cloth from which a handsome profit would be made. My father enjoyed the general jealousy in parading his treasure.

"'You see, brothers,' he continued, with a smile, 'that Susannah is no article of luxury, and yet I have not told you all: the principal use I shall make of her must remain a secret; but believe me, what people do not tell is always the best, and there are, perhaps, fifty thousand pounds beneath this mystery.'

"The guests opened their eyes; Israels carelessly drew from his pocket the portfolio in which he had placed Rehoboam's forgeries.

"'But let us drink,' he exclaimed, 'and talk about something else. Eliazer, my brother, will you discount an acceptance of Dawes, Preeble and Co.?'

"'Money is scarce,' Eliazer said, his smiling brow suddenly becoming serious. 'What's the amount of the bill, brother Israels?'

"'Four hundred and twenty-five pounds nine shillings, Eliazer; I will give you the odd shillings as discount.'

"'Inteet,' the old Jew muttered, 'nine shillings! better add nine poundsh for the discount. I scharge you so little ash nine guineas ash a friend. The commission, ash you know, is two per shent., which makes eight poundsh ten shillings and twopence halfpenny.'

"'Very good,' said Israels, gaily; 'I like you even when you slay me alive, brother Eliazer. Here is the bill in question, endorsed by Staunton and Duff, of Cork.'

"He passed the bill to Eliazer, who placed his glasses astride his thin and pointed nose. The other guests, to whom my father had given a meaning look, drank, laughed, and looked at Eliazer aside. The latter carefully examined the bill, and, at the end of two or three minutes, he took off his glasses and held out the bill to my father.

"'On reflection, brother Israels, I haff no monish!' he said, deliberately.

"My father frowned, and a flush of anger crossed his face. The laughers went over to Eliazer's side.

"'You had money enough just now,' he began.

"'I have schanged my mind,' Eliazer interrupted him, sharply.

"'Why so?'

"'Becaush the bill ish a forchery, ma tear!'

"Israels smote the table violently with his fist. The veins on his forehead swelled, and wrinkles formed above the corners of his moustache.

"'It is true,' he said, striving to retain his calmness; 'but our brothers knew that I should not have taken your money, Eliazer. They were warned that it was merely an experiment.'

"'Very coot,' the old Jew muttered, as he slowly emptied his glass. 'In that case, the experiment ish unfavourable; that's all. The man who made that bill vash an ass.'

"'Where's the fault?'

"'In a coot many places, brother; there ish a turn too much in the flourish, for example.'

"'That's true,' my father muttered.

"'Lastly,' the old Jew said, 'there ish a bad schpell in the pody of the bill, and Preeble's clerk comes from the universities.'

"'The error *is* there,' my father exclaimed, in a fearful passion, 'it is, by Beelzebub! Oh! that villain Rehoboam is mocking me. I will kill him!'

"He drank two glasses of wine in rapid succession, and then turned to me, saying:—

"'Go and fetch that brute of a Rehoboam, Sukey!'

"I trembled like a leaf, but did not stir: I would sooner have died than fetched Rehoboam at this moment. My father, however, repeated the order in a thundering voice, and seeing that I did not obey, raised his hand upon me in a paroxysm of fury."

"Did he strike you?' asked Lancaster, pale and trembling.

"No, Brian: his hand fell by his side, and then he rushed from the room. A moment after he returned, dragging Rehoboam in by the hair.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### SLAVERY.

"My father's face was frightful to look upon at the moment when he reappeared in the doorway. Rehoboam, half dead with terror, uttered inarticulate moans. My father, though externally he did not look stronger than the general run of men, really possessed the muscles of a prize-fighter. He hurled Rehoboam from him so violently, that the poor wretch fell down at the other end of the room. The guests quickly turned round on their chairs to see more conveniently what was going to take place.

"Rehoboam remained motionless and prostrate at the spot where he had fallen; his terrified eyes were fixed on my father's face. He was pale as a corpse and his dishevelled hair, that partly covered his forehead and cheeks, gave them an even more livid hue. My heart was contracted with fear and pity, and I looked around the guests to find some intercession for poor Rehoboam. But I saw nothing in these marble faces save a little cold curiosity, and a slight impatience for the *finale*.

"Eliazer was lame, and in walking supported himself on a thick bamboo cane. This cane was leaning in a corner of the room. My father, who was looking round the room for some weapon, saw the bamboo, and eagerly seized it. His anger had attained a paroxysm; he laughed and roared in the anticipation of his brutal revenge.

"'Tell me, brothers, tell me,' he said in a panting voice, 'what does a vile slave deserve who exposes his master to the risk of hanging?'

"'That depends on circumstances and country,' Samuels answered; abroad, you can do as you please, but in London prudence is necessary, and a good thrashing may be sufficient.'

"'A thrashing appears to me to reconcile prudence and justice,' Eliazer said, gravely, in confirmation.

"Israels, with two leaps, covered the space separating him from Rehoboam, and the heavy cane produced a whizzing sound as it fell on the poor dumb man's loins. He held up his hands suppliantly; Israels beat them down with a second blow; and then, his fury augmenting as he struck, he wielded his weapon with a blind rage, without cessation or mercy, for more than a minute. All to be heard were the hoarse groans of Rehoboam, who had sunk to the ground, and the incessant sound of the cane cutting his flesh; and while striking, Israels grew hot, and said—

"'So you make a curl too much in the flourish of Preeble and Son, you execrable robber! Ah! you infamous brute, you tremble in tracing the P in Preeble! Traitor, clumsy assassin, you make mistakes in spelling, in the body of a bill—all this to get me hanged, you abject, unclean beast! There! there! there! (and each time he dealt frightful blows) there, scoundrel! there, Herod, there!'

"Israels stopped in exhaustion; the bamboo cane slipped from his grasp, and he fell back panting in a chair. I had closed my eyes, to avoid this hideous spectacle as far as was possible. When the blows ceased, I heard the guests chattering around me.

"'He is dead,' said Samuels, with a grin.

"'Brother Israels has a fine strong arm,' added another; 'how he beat him!

"'I fancy he has broken my bamboo,' old Eliazer growled, angrily.

"I opened my eyes, and saw at the spot where Rehoboam had just now been kneeling an inert mass that offered no sign of life. But all at once this mass slowly rose, and stood in front of the panting Israels. He held the terrible cane in *his* hand. I thought it was all over with my father.

"By an instinctive movement, more powerful than my will, I rushed between Israels and Rehoboam. It was my father who now trembled. The dumb man, drawn up to his full height and with his body slightly thrown back, seemed ready to strike. His eyes flashed wildly beneath his thick eyebrows; the muscles of his face were contracted with threatening energy. All the weakness that aroused my pity just before had disappeared; a

manly fire had taken the place of that decrepitude which suffering and captivity had brought on him. He was terrible and strong because he was free. The guests did not stir, for this unexpected change rendered the drama interesting. They looked on.

"'Have pity, good Rehoboam,' I exclaimed; 'have pity on my father, for your love of me.'

"With a violent gesture he ordered me to withdraw; but I refused to obey, as I had done with Israels. The latter had found time for reflection, and was not the man to neglect the moment of respite I had granted him.

"'Reuben,' he exclaimed in German, a language Rehoboam did not understand, 'catch him round the neck, brother, and I will give you ten pounds.'

"'You are witnesses,' Reuben said to the guests.

"'We are witnesses,' they answered, 'Israels has promised ten pounds.'

"Rehobom hesitated for a moment, on hearing these words uttered in a foreign tongue; Reuben had risen, and was crawling up to him on tiptoe. I opened my mouth to warn him, but my father quickly gagged me with his handkerchief. At the same moment Reuben's arms were twined round Rehoboam's neck, who at once turned purple. The cane slipped from his grasp, he uttered a hoarse groan and closed his eyes, making no further attempt at resistance.

'Let him go,' said my father, 'he must not be killed, for his death would not cure the extra curl in Preeble's flourish. Let him go, his rage has passed. I know him, and he will keep quiet.'

"'It is your look-out,' Reuben answered, as he loosed the hapless Rehoboam.

"There was a movement of terror among the guests; each expected to see the dumb man rush on my father, but nothing of the sort took place.

"'Down on your knees,' the latter roughly ordered.

"Rehoboam obeyed; my father whirled the terrible bamboo over his head, but did not strike him.

"'I pardon you,' he said, 'because you are a brute beast. I thrashed you as I would have done a dog or a horse; but, when I beat them, I hold my hand before death, not for their sake, but for my own, as I do not desire a loss. Go up to your work again, and do it properly, do you hear? or it will be the worse for you.'

"Rehoboam rose, bowed his head, and left the room. He did not turn till he reached the threshold, and I still tremble at the thought of the look he gave my father. All his vengeance was in that look; my father as well as the guests felt it. Old Eliazer shook his hand when Rehoboam had finally disappeared.

"'That savage animal will throttle you some day, Israels,' he muttered.

"My father shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and a smile of haughty superiority played round his lips.

"'Do not trouble yourself about that, brother,' he said; 'the man must be a poor hand who cannot escape the kick of a vicious horse.'

"Well,' said Reuben, with a laugh, 'the last kick was rather difficult to parry, I think, brother Israels, since you was glad to buy my help for ten pounds.'

"My father threw him his purse. 'Drink, brethren,' he said, or begone; the subject of conversation does not please me.'

"The Jews hid their mocking smiles in their beards, and continued drinking. Israels had his reasons for thus braving Rehoboam's vengeance. He fancied he understood the poor dumb man, and, in truth, the wretch was so cowed, that he did not dare resist save through extreme provocation. His slavery was in some sort voluntary; my father exerted absolute power over him, and needed not to have employed brute force to daunt him.

"We remained in London for about six months after the scene I have just described, but my captivity had ceased. My father led me to understand that a person, whom it would have been very awkward for me to meet, had left London. Consequently, I was permitted to ride out, go to the Park, and at times even pass a few hours at the play. My father accompanied me everywhere, and assumed the duty formerly performed by Rehoboam.

"'You see how lovely everybody considers you, Sukey,' he would say; 'in two or three years, these compliments which you overhear from the lips of so many noble Lords will go straight to your heart—you will love and be happy.'

"The entire house was now at my disposal, the only restriction being that the footmen were not allowed to address me. Shall I tell you, Brian, what I loved most at this time? It was passing a few hours in Rehoboam's prison. My presence consoled him, and I was happy at the good I did him.

"He showed me strange things in my father's absence, and explained to me the use of the essences and pomades ranged on

a table in the factory. One day he rose from the table at which he toiled incessantly, and shook his stiffened limbs; then he shook his long untended mane, and began smiling.

"You know, Brian, how expressive is the face of people deprived of speech. Poor Rehoboam's smile spoke simply, and seemed to say—

"'Ah, Miss Susan, I am about to show you something surprising.'

"He took me by the hand, and led me to the dressing-table, before which he sat down. His gestures were full of emphasis, and resembled those of jugglers before they perform their most curious tricks. He took up in turn five or six vials, which he sniffed at and put on one side, and then made me a sign to close my eyes. I obeyed, for the sake of pleasing him.

"I think I have told you that Rehoboam was an Oriental. His glistening brown complexion had a peculiar hue, somewhat resembling Israels'. His hair and beard were jet-black. I remained for about two minutes with my eyes shut. At the end of that period, Rehoboam touched my arm with a growl, which was his fashion of smiling.

"I looked up, and, on my word, did not recognise him, but fell back several yards, while he laughed most heartily. He had produced a change in himself that appeared magical. His brown complexion had assumed a pale and dull hue. Stay, Brian, the very colour of Tyrrel, the blind man whom you style Sir Edmund Mackenzie."

"Sir Edmund!" Lancaster repeated, mechanically, his mind apparently troubled by confused thoughts.

"No comparison could be more striking," Susannah continued. "Rehoboam's eyes had lost their savage brilliancy; he resembled a European, an Englishman, a London street beggar, brutalised by want; the more so, as his long black hair had changed its colour, and hung down mingling with his dyed beard. There was not a hair in his face that had retained its natural colour."

"And this change softened his expression?" Brian asked thoughtfully.

"The change softened it to this extent, that it entirely took away its character—this rough face had suddenly become insignificant, and like that of beggars we meet in the street."

"Oh!" said the gentleman, absently, like a man thinking aloud, "I should like to hear Sir Edmund Mackenzie speak when he is not disguising his voice."

Susannah looked up at him anxiously and searchingly.

"A wild idea," he said, "has just crossed my mind, but pray go on. My thoughts, since I have been listening to you, have been fermenting and going in impossible directions; but we will return to reality, Susannah," he added, in a tender voice and with a soft smile—"we will return to it soon, to be happy after the fashion of all the world. To-day the last chapter of your strange adventures will terminate; we will, please Heaven, close this fantastic romance as speedily as possible. And you will prove a noble woman in society, because your heart so long resisted the deadly influence of that atmosphere of vice in which your youth was passed."

The girl seemed to hang eagerly on these words of hope. A smile played round the pure lines of her mouth, and her moist eyes returned thanks for the promised happiness.

"Poor Rehoboam enjoyed my surprise," she went on, after a few moments of silence; "he showed me his hair, and then the vials, to make me understand that the latter contained the stuff to change the colour of the hair instantaneously; then he pointed to his cheek and to the pomade, and his guttural growl conduced to his good humour. All at once the muscles of his face quivered. He did not blush, as he could not do so under the thick layer he had put on his cheek, but his eyes turned in terror to the door. Israels was standing there.

"'What is this?' he asked, with a frown.

"'I asked Rehoboam, sir," I began.

"'Lie away, Sukey,' he said, pleasantly; 'you cannot practise that art too frequently. But, by Beelzebub, you must not blush at such a trifle. People must only blush at what is bad, my girl.'

"He walked up to Rehoboam, and roughly pulled his hair.

"'As for you, Master Dummy,' he said, 'you are now uglier than you usually are. Don't tremble, you brute, I am not angry with you. I had intended one day to make this experiment in my daughter's presence, for it is as well for her to know all the tricks of our trade. Really, you villain of a Rehoboam, you are not so dull as you might be thought. Would you have recognised him in the street, Sukey?'

"'No, sir.'

"He began smiling.

"'Many people would pay handsomely for my beautifier,' he said, with evident self-satisfaction. 'Come, Master Dummy, to work; we shall soon be at the end of our troubles.'

"Rehoboam returned to his den, and passed a certain number

of bills over to my father. They must have been perfect, for Israels had no fault to find.

"'Very good,' he muttered, 'we can take the field now. That will render Sukey quite fit to belong to the Peerage. Very good, Rehoboam; I will take you with me, and you shall serve as page to Miss Susannah. Are you satisfied?'

"The dumb man displayed his long white teeth with a frank smile of joy. I was probably the only person in the world to whom he felt attached—I cannot call attachment the charm that riveted him to my father, for he redoubled his sceptical blasphemy, and tried by his mockery to still my enthusiasm. But it was in vain. I grew up, and my mind expanded to contain the idea of God. This idea, still very vague, and surrounded by deep gloom, still occupied my thoughts. It might be sent in a false direction, but not destroyed, and all his efforts to stifle it only caused it to develop the more.

"I will not describe to you, Brian, what occurred to me in France, Italy, and the East; we remained for four years in these different countries, and I know them as well as if I had been born in them, especially France. But what I did during the four years can be described in two words, for I always did the same thing.

"I helped to cheat, Brian; I tell you this with shame in my heart, and I cheated—myself. I should have opposed my father energetically, as I did on several occasions, had he tried to inflict physical injury on a third party; but obtaining money by fraud did not seem to me opprobrious, and it was my innate conviction that everybody in this world aimed at the same thing."

Susannah let her head drop, and was silent. Her lover took her hand, which he respectfully kissed.

"Rouse yourself, Susannah," he said, in a low and grave voice, through which his restrained enthusiasm pierced; "look every one in the face, as you do not fear to lay bare your loving mind, and have no lurking-place in your conscience in which you conceal any portion of your recollections. Why blush at another person's crimes? Would you be culpable if, in the densest darkness, you thrust a person unwittingly over a precipice? Oh! how sacred a thing it is thus to bewail faults which you have not committed! I say, from the bottom of my heart, shame on the person who saw in your life matter for blame or suspicion. I love and admire you, Susannah!"

"Thanks, Brian, thanks!" she murmured, with tears in her eyes; "I knew that you were good, and noble, and generous, but I did not hope so much, and indulgence was all that I

thought I dared to ask. Oh! I too love you, and more each minute; may Heaven permit that you love me for ever.

"My father's sole and constant object, during this long journey, was discounting the false bills manufactured by Rehoboam; he succeeded to a considerable extent, and you must have heard speak of the storm roused on the Exchange by this collective robbery, committed to the injury of the first City houses. Wherever he went, letters, or old relations, brought him into connection with Jews engaged in some dark traffic. Owing to their secret aid, the noble name my father assumed, and also, I am bound to confess, to my aid, he managed to realise a considerable sum. When we left Damascus for London, my father possessed over fifty thousand pounds.

"I had become a woman by this time; serious thoughts rose in my mind in my hours of solitude, and a vague want of loving and being loved oppressed me. Israels considered me ripe for the most odious part of his designs; he wished to traffic with both my heart and my body."

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### THE SYREN.

WHILE uttering the last sentences the girl's bosom heaved, her cheek turned pale, while her black eyes emitted a furtive flash.

"It would have been a terrible moment for me, Brian," she continued, "had I at first penetrated Israels' intentions, but my ignorance partially spared me the agony of my situation; when I at length learned what was wanted of me, I was strong, for I loved you!

"And then my father had not the time to open my eyes.

"His first care, on reaching London, was to re-establish magnificently his Sanspareille gambling-house in Leicester Square. You will remember how fashionable that hell was for the greater part of a year. It was nicknamed the 'Golden Youths' Club,' and his constituents were composed exclusively of the highest nobility of the three kingdoms.

"But my father did not on that account give up his private house in M—— Square. He practised usury there, and his discount office, set up in the parlour I had so long occupied, was thronged from morn till night.

"It was a short while after our arrival in London I was walking about the garden, indulging in those vague thoughts that fill the head of youth. The first puffs of the spring breeze blew upon me, and a few poor birds, lost in the immensity of London, were singing softly on the branches, which were just being covered with leaf and blossom. I heard a noise in the anteroom; it was you, Brian, who had just entered. A strange charm, my destiny, doubtless, caused me to open the door curiously and look at you.

"I saw you, and fancied you were very handsome. My father had brought from France two tall footmen, who barred your way. You did not grow angry; your features retained their haughty indifference; and yet they got out of your way when you had said a few words to them, accompanied by an imperious gesture.

"I was surprised, Brian, for I had often seen these men accost visitors insolently. I was above all astonished at the powers you possessed of compelling obedience, without raising your voice in threats or anger. My father could also make himself obeyed, but it was solely through blustering.

"Twilight was beginning to set in. Those short hours during which the January sun manages to pierce through the fog suspended over London like a pall had almost expired. The fog was growing dense without, and the projecting furniture cast a shadow, in which nothing was visible, When you had entered my father's office, I glided along the outer wall, and placed myself at a window where I could see all without being seen. My heart beat fiercely, I know not why; my eyes burnt as if I were going to cry, and yet I had in my heart a new and unknown joy.

"As long as you were with my father, I remained at my post, I looked; something stole from you to me, and I intoxicated myself by this mysterious emanation. On that day, Brian, I loved you as much as I do now. When you left my father's house, and I no longer saw you, I turned cold, and my tears became bitter. Then I sat down beneath a tree, and took pleasure in recalling your image, which was engraved in letters of fire upon my mind.

"'Did you notice that caller, Sukey?' my father asked.

"'Oh! yes, sir,' I faltered.

"'In what a tremor you say that!' he exclaimed, with a smile; 'I'll wager that he frightened you. He is a madman, Sue, who has scarce enough to keep him for two years, and is trying to reduce those two years to six months.'

"'What is his name?'

"'Brian Lancaster.'

"I think that no music ever produced such an impression on my ear. Brian! Oh! your name is like yourself; it is noble and sweet, and the heart remembers it. There was no sleep now for me. I thought of you all that night, and when day arrived, I was still thinking. It was the same on other nights, and when I fell asleep, I saw you in my dreams. Oh! how many times did I see myself seated by your side as I am now,

with my hand in your hand, and smiling at your smile. But I awoke, and that is a cruel thing to do after so sweet a dream."

Susannah uttered the last words with a trembling voice. Her exquisite brow was overcast with sorrow.

"Poor Countess," she murmured, "she too has awakened from her dream of happiness, and yet she is lovely and good, is she not?"

"Indeed she is," Lancaster answered, "the loveliest and most noble, after you, Susannah. And he no longer loves her. He never did love her, that is the truth. The Marquis de Rio Santo is ambitious."

"And what are you, Brian?" Susannah asked, timidly.

Lancaster shook his head with a smile.

"I am 'queer,'" he answered.

"It was a long time ere I saw you again," Susannah went on; "my father had doubtless lent you a large sum, for you did not return to our house. But I did not forget you; I was constantly expecting you.

"The second time I saw you was in the Park. I recognised you a long distance off, among all the gentlemen who filled the Row, and my heart leaped towards you. You were mounted on a splendid horse, whose action excited the envy and admiration of your rivals."

"Ruby!" Brian interrupted her, with an involuntary sigh—"crow's meat since."

Susannah kissed the locket. It was a dumb funeral oration for the steed.

"You wore in your button-hole a camellia—the flower I kept so long in remembrance of you. All at once there was a disturbance. A carriage drawn by splendid horses had knocked down a poor old woman, who lay bleeding on the ground.

"'Look there carefully, Sukey,' my father said; "that's Whitemanor, who has just driven over an old woman. I'll be hanged if he ever looked back at her.'

"'I will raise her,' I exclaimed, as I struck my horse with the whip.

"But Israels caught hold of my bridle. 'Stuff and nonsense! if the old woman is dead, where's the good of picking her up? If she is not dead, some fool or another will help her.'

"That *fool* was yourself, Brian; do you remember the circumstance?"

"I think I do, vaguely," returned he.

"Oh, I remember it, and fancy I can still see you. You

leaped off your horse, and took the poor fainting woman in your arms.

"'A smelling-bottle—a smelling-bottle, fair ladies!' you said. waving your handkerchief.

"A dozen carriages stopped, and as many pretty ladies bowed to you with smiles. Instead of one scent-bottle, twenty fell at your feet. As you stooped to pick one up, the flower slipped from your button-hole. I bounded forward, Brian, and ere my father could account for my action, the flower was concealed in my bosom. You raised the old woman, and caused her to inhale the salts, and then, when she had regained her senses, you gave her your purse.

"'All very fine,' Israels growled; 'that's what I call a fool and his money soon parted. But after all, he is not so mad as he seems, and he selects the woman to relieve who has been run over by Whitemanor.'"

Lancaster blushed, for in his heart he acknowledged the truth of the reproach. Certainly, under any circumstances, his innate generosity would have led him to succour misfortune, but misfortune caused by his brother had a two-fold claim on his aid, not through a paternal feeling, but through antagonism. He blushed, therefore, because he felt that on this occasion he had not deserved Susannah's enthusiastic praise.

She continued:—

"My father cauld not imagine that anybody could be generous without a motive; those like yourself, Brian, were enigmas to him, and he sought in vain to fathom them. This caused me to love you the more—to love you too dearly; for you were ever and everywhere before my eyes. Incessantly I saw your lofty forehead, and the tranquil calmness and boldness of your glance.

"It was a real ailment, and the more incurable because I did not seek to shun it. I found waking dreams, which returned in my sleep; I desired ardently, but blindly; I hoped, though unable to define my hopes at this early period of my love. I frequently wept, and when my father surprised tears in my eyes, he would say—

"'Patience, Sukey, patience; we will take care of you, my child; and in a short time I will take you to a spot where you can pick and choose.'

I fancy that I can now clearly understand the meaning in this brutal language, but at that time it was an empty sound of my ears. My father, however, kept his word, and took me one night to a spot where I might have chosen gallants indeed. But

it was not for that purpose he took me there at first; he calculated on me to play a species of farce, to serve one of his speculations.

"You probably remember the supper at which Israels enunciated to his Jewish brethren the various services he hoped to obtain from me. He had said on that night that he wanted a syren to attract rich men to his saloon. This was not exactly true, for the splendid rooms of the Golden Youths' Club were always filled with lovely women, dressed like queens; still these women, as it seemed, were not sufficient, for Israels wished to rely on me, and make me play the part of Loreley.

"He had invented something, unexpected and theatrical, harmonizing with the magnificent decorations of the Sanspareille Club. In the principal room he put up a rich curtain, behind which my harp and piano were concealed. A strong high balustrade prevented any approach to the curtain. When I entered this place for the first time, the warm perfumed air had a powerful effect on my nerves, while the mutter of the conversation close at hand terrified me. My father bade me sit down to the piano.

"'Don't be frightened, Susey,' he said, 'but sing your best. No one can see you.'

"He spoke the truth. The curtain completely concealed me. I ran my fingers over the keys, whereupon a few angry voices were heard among the players on the other side of the curtain.

"'That's a bad innovation, Spencer; stop that piano, which stuns us.'

"'Go on, Sukey!" my father said to me.

"I cared little whether I pleased or displeased my audience. I preluded for a few seconds, and then began a French operatic air I had learned from a retired donna at Nice. At first my voice rose cold and methodical, as if I were singing to my professor; but I can never resist the power of music. It seized upon me, and I put my whole soul in my singing; I forgot the audience, and the spot where I was; I sang only for myself.

"'Famous, Sukey!" my father said, as I completed the last note.

"At the same instant frenzied bursts of applause broke out in the room. It was something strange after the grumbling that had greeted the first notes of my song.

"'It is Nilsson,' some said.

"'It is Albani, who has drunk at the fountain of youth!'

"'It is Patti, who has recovered the high soprano notes in her register.

"'My dear fellows,' a flute-like voice exclaimed, 'I am sure it is Grisi revived. You do not remember her, you boys, but that's the voice! I am speaking seriously.'

"My father rubbed his hands, and laughed silently.

"'Gentlemen,' he at last said, 'it is neither Nilsson, Patti, nor Grisi. Again.'

"'Who is it then, Spencer?'

"'It is "the Syren."'

"There was a confused sound of voices on the other side of the curtain, and my father anxiously awaited the result. I listened too, Brian, hoping to hear your voice among the rest. You were not there that night?"

"I was not, but I afterwards heard, as did all London, the mysterious and incomparable syren of the Golden Youths' Club, and I now understand why her unrivalled voice produced such an effect on me. I could only love that portion of you I knew, and I loved your voice."

"How much better should I have sung, had I known you were listening to me.

"In a few minutes the talking had grown into a perfect clamour. The audience insisted on seeing me, and requested the balustrade to be removed.

"'Gentlemen,' my father said, 'I am very sorry to refuse you anything, but the Syren will not show herself.'

"'One hundred pounds if you will present me alone, Israels,' a voice said.

"'Five hundred!' said another.

"My father found difficulty in restraining his joy.

"'What an idea, by Moloch! What an idea!' he muttered.

"'A thousand pounds!' a voice was heard.

"'For no price, gentlemen,' Israels answered, 'so pray go on with your game. The Syren is no longer here.'

"'Will she return?'

"'The Syren will sing again to-morrow.'

"While saying this, my father led me away and put me in his carriage, which conveyed me home. The next evening the rooms of the Golden Youths' were too small to hold the crowd I sang, and the railing was torn down in order to see me. But I had already left. My father was indeed a clever man. He had formed a good idea of the refined mob who were his customers. This mystery piqued to an eminent degree the worn-out curiosity of the nobles. I was spoken of throughout London."

"That is to say, no one but you was spoken of," Brian interrupted her. "Artists who had never seen you, drew your

portrait, and your renown crossed the Channel. But was no one allowed to see you?'

"No one. There was not a visitor who could boast of having seen the Syren of the Golden Club. My father waited, and speculated on the effect of curiosity raised to madness. He awaited the parovysm of fashion, in order to sacrifice me, Brian. I am compelled to believe it. However, he made no mystery of his designs in my presence, but they terrified me but little, because I did not know their object.

"We women have a vain light heart, easily accessible to the joys of pride. How I should have revelled in the applause that nightly greeted me, had not my heart been filled with your image, Brian! And yet, I am bound to confess, pride at times stifled the love within me, and the sound of the applause deadened the passionate outcry of my soul.

"I now pardon myself for this, on thinking that your applause was at times mingled with that of the others. It was that, perhaps, that pierced through my indifference, and what I took for pride may have been the mystical joy of love.

"'Susannah,' said my father one day to me, 'you are about to be very happy. I intend to make a lady of you, and you shall make your choice among the lords who applaud you every night.'

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### THE GOLDEN YOUTHS.

"My father said that to me, Brian," the girl continued, "and the idea confusedly entered my mind. I could not have said why it appeared to me repulsive, and yet a vague and dull suffering plunged me into melancholy up to the time for starting. I thought of you; my heart summoned you to my aid, and I said to myself that you alone would save me from this approaching shapeless peril.

"Dressed magnificently, I seated myself in our carriage, and we set out. During the entire drive my father displayed a wild gaiety; but his gaiety always had an after-taste of bitterness, that caused one to feel sad and alarmed. When we reached Leicester Square, there was a long line of carriages at the door of the club.

"We entered by a back door, as was the case each evening, and on entering the portion of the room cut off by the curtain, we could convince ourselves, by the deafening noise of the conversation, that the assemblage was even more numerous than usual, and that they were talking of me.

"'Let us see,' said my father, 'I do not wish to do violence to your heart, Susannah; I will point you out one of the most respectable of these lords. See, there he is, Sukey.'

"I looked, and saw you, Brian."

"Me?" Brian repeated, in wonder.

"You had just come in; I saw but you. Alas! it was not you whom my father pointed out to me. 'Oh, sir,' I exclaimed, moved by a delicious hope, "you do not deceive me—you wish to introduce me to that gentleman?" Israels looked at me fixedly. 'To him, Sukey? Most assuredly! Do you know him

already?' 'How can you ask me that question?' I exclaimed, with tears in my eyes. 'Well, that is uncommonly lucky,' my father muttered; 'but it must be allowed that girls have strange whims. Hang me, I but hope that is Grace——but no matter—I will go and fetch the Ambassador, Suke.' He walked towards the door. I paid no attention to his words, for I was looking at you, Brian, and was happy. Before leaving the room, Israels reflected. and hurried back to me. 'I say, Sukey, let us have no misunderstanding; and I am talking of Prince Dimitri Tolstor, who has just entered the room. He is that tall man, with a face a little—a little uncommon, and a breast covered with stars and crosses. I hope we understand one another.' I could only answer with my eyes. The man he pointed out to me was—but you know him, Brian."

"I do—I do," said Lancaster, who found it difficult to breathe; "for mercy sake, finish your story."

"He horrified and alarmed me, so I clasped my hands, and looked at my father imploringly. 'Ah!' said the latter, with a frown, 'I see that we are playing at cross purposes. And whom may you be talking about, Suke?' 'Brian Lancaster,' I replied. Israels burst into a sharp, dry laugh. 'The Earl's young brother!' he exclaimed; 'on my soul, that would be a good joke. If Brian had anything—ah! ah! ah! when I think of it I cannot help laughing. Why, he hasn't a shilling, Suke,' he continued, 'a match with him would be funny—excessively funny. Come, forget this folly, and prepare to receive the Russian Ambassador.' 'What does he want with me?' I asked passionately. 'The same affection as you want of Mr. Lancaster, Miss Suke. However, he will tell you himself.' 'I refuse to see him,' I exclaimed. 'You will see him, Sukey, he uttered, in that imperious and threatening voice which he employed with poor Rehoboam—'oh, by all that's bright, you will receive him.' I was suffering terribly, and I felt my strength deserting me: still I said, with considerable resolution,—

"'No, sir, I will *not* receive him.'

"Your presence gave me courage, Brian. Israels seized my hand, and squeezed it so, that his steel fingers were buried in my flesh. His eyes had assumed a sinister and really infernal expression. He put his face quite close to mine.

"'You are mine,' he said, in a voice choking with rage; you belong to none but me; I am your master; I could kill you,—do you understand? And as I must sell you, dare to make resistance." I was crushed, but did not yield.

"You can kill me,' I said, 'but not make me do as you wish.'

"'Well, I will kill you then,' he said, with foaming lips; I will kill you, but not at one blow. You shall die by slow degrees, very gently, a little every day. Curses on you!'

"He paced to and fro a few moments, and then entered the adjoining room, and went straight up to the Prince. I at once rose, ran across the room and the passages into the street, and it was not long before I reached home; where, instead of going to my own room, I went up into the workshop of Rehoboam, who was the sole being who had a semblance of affection for me.

"The poor mute was lying full dressed on a mat in the middle of the room; it was his bed, and he was asleep. When he awoke, I told him of Israels' odious conduct, and my flight from the Golden Youths.

"He bowed his head and seemed to be reflecting. After a few minutes he led me to his working-room, and showed me a cupboard just large enough to hide me, and then tapped with his knuckles an empty plate that stood on the table. This meant, in the poor fellow's language, that he would conceal me and share his food with me.

"About eleven in the morning, Rehoboam and myself heard the master's rap at the front door. I hid myself, trembling, in the cupboard that was henceforth to be my refuge. Rehoboam placed himself before his table, so as to prevent Israels passing.

"In a few minutes he came in.

"He walked up to Rehoboam, and threw on the table a paper he held in his hand.

"'Look here,' he said; 'write me that signature. We will use it when opportunity serves, and his Grace will gain nothing. Take care not to spoil the bill, Master Mute; if a mark is visible on it, I will dash out your brains.'

"Rehoboam took the paper, and began to trace the signature. My father continued his walk up and down.

"'How are you getting on, Dumby?' he suddenly asked, looking on the paper. 'Villain! cursed brute! I told you to take care. This time you shall pay for all.'

"The poor dumb man was too terrified to tremble, and my father, after standing for a few seconds before his victim, as if desirous to tear him piecemeal with his own hands, rushed to the arm rack, and selected the heaviest of his life-preservers. I felt Rehoboam's chair tremble, but he did not stir. My father walked towards him with measured steps, as if seeking, with cruel joy, the spot where he should strike the first blow.

"I closed my eyes, as I had done on that night when Israels beat Rehoboam with old Eliezer's bamboo. But here there were no means of escaping the horrors of the scene. At the first blow Israels struck, Rehoboam's flesh actually rebounded. Not only did I hear the lead fall on the sufferer, but I felt the counter-stroke of each blow. I fancied that my own heart was being struck with a hammer. I suffered—oh! I cannot tell you what I suffered. I heard and felt, then, these furiously-dealt blows. Then I received a violent blow from the chair; two savage roars rent my ears, and I involuntarily opened my eyes. Rehoboam had seized my father by the throat, and held him as in a vice.

"Then the dumb man began laughing, and displayed his long white teeth, sharp as a wild beast's. His savage instinct violently aroused, returned at this moment with incredible energy. He dragged my father to the other end of the workshop, seized a long rope, and bound him, only interrupting his work from time to time to burst into a hoarse laugh.

"When Rehoboam had bound my father, he rushed to the door, and disappeared with a yell of savage triumph. A few minutes later, the dumb man recrossed the threshold, still bleeding, and with his face fearfully bruised. He was followed by an inspector and two constables, whom he had fetched, and who now entered Israel's secret workshop."

Susannah then related how her father had been condemned to death for forgery,—how she had sickened when she saw him mount the scaffold,—how the Jew's body swung round in the wind,—and how she had wandered houseless and homeless from Newgate Prison yard, until her meeting with the "Crown Arms" landlady. When she had concluded her description of her subsequent arrival at Wimpole Street, and had even pronounced the terrible password, "Lords of the Night," she raised her dark eyes to Brian's face, and then, dropping them again, she said, softly,—

"You know all now; I have hidden nothing; I have laid my soul bare before you, and it is for you to say if I am still worthy of your love."

Her adorer did not at once answer. Tears stood in the lovely eye-lashes.

At length he knelt on one knee, taking her hand and kissing it.

"Will you bear the name of Lancaster?" he cried, with that exquisite and rare gallantry, of which but very few families have retained the chivalrous traditions in our money-grubbing age.

"Do you, indeed, ask me, Brian," Susannah stammered, "whether I will be your wife?"

She bent forward in rupture, but could not speak.

"Come, exclaimed the Earl's son—"oh, come. Do not remain a moment longer beneath this impure roof. The Countess of Lancewood is your friend,, her house will be a proper refuge for you till the day that will give me the right to protect you myself. Come!"

Susannah rose, all radiant.

"I am ready to follow you, Brian," she said.

They walked towards the door, but at the moment when Lancaster turned the handle, it opened itself, and Tyrrel, the blind man, appeared on the threshold. Behind him were four powerful men of determined aspect.

"You entered this house alone, Mr. Lancaster," the blind man said; "you must leave it the same."

Susannah, in her terror, was hanging upon the gentleman's arm: the latter disengaged himself gently. For a second, the thought of a struggle seemed to cross his mind: his eyes flashed fire, and he seemed to be choosing among his adversaries the one he should "floor" first. But he thought better of it, and answered, in a suppressed voice,—

"Be it so, Sir Edmund; I will go out alone. I shall return soon," he added, as he hurriedly bent down to Susannah's ear. "You will not have to wait long, I swear to you.

He quickly passed Tyrrel and his acolytes, and rushed downstairs into the street. Once there, he ran up Wimpole Street, and turned into Marylebone Lane, where he only stopped when he reached the police station. Introduced at once to the inspector, Brian had a short conference with him, after which, a sergeant and a file of police were placed at his disposal. This little band, stimulated by Brian, ran at full speed down Wimpole Street. Half an hour at the most elapsed between Brian's departure and the arrival of the detachment of police before the house. The officer knocked at the door, and demanded entrance for the police.

"All right! come along in for your rabbit pie!" a mocking voice answered from the first-floor window.

The window was closed. A moment later the door was opened. The police at once rushed in, but no one opposed their search. They examined the house from cellar to garret, and found the wardrobes open and in disorder, as if after a hurried departure. But there was not a manservant or a master. There was no horses in the stables, no carriages in the coach-house. The house was deserted.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### THE STORY OF RIO SANTO.

In 18—, twenty years previous to the period of the foregoing history, there lived in St. Giles's a family consisting of a father and mother, and two children. Christian O'Brian was an Irish gentleman, whose estates had gradually been wrested from him, and at length one fine day the door of his own house was locked against him, never again to open.

Mrs. O'Brian was a worthy, hard-working woman, loved by her husband and her children; Elizabeth, a gay, laughing girl of sixteen years, was O'Brian's darling; while the son, Fergus, a fine handsome lad of eighteen, was the idol of his mother.

Time went on, money came in but slowly; yet Betsy remained gay in the midst of all their sorrow. Day after day she became less attentive to her work, and more careful of her looks; until one night Fergus returned home, to find his sister still absent. They waited, and waited, and waited; but Betsy did not come. She was never to come home again.

After a night of tears and despair Fergus spent a day in searching, but it was of no avail. Day after day passed, and she came not; and grief soon brought its natural consequence in the death of the father and mother.

One evening some time after this, an accident in the street brought Fergus O'Brian in contact with a gentleman named Macfarlane, and his sister. Angus Macfarlane was then a fine young man, some thirty years of age; and Mary a beautiful and lively girl; and the friendship thus begun went on uninterrupedly.

The house of Macfarlane became that of Fergus, who soon knew all the secrets of the honest Scotchman, and the motives

which brought him to London. As to his own thoughts, Fergus only confided to Angus that of his love for Mary, which day by day grew apace.

Several months rolled by. MacNab, a friend of Macfarlane's who had been introduced to Fergus upon his first entry into the house, still preserved towards Fergus his ceremonious and cold politeness; but MacNab was not master of the house. Notwithstanding under his auspices a young nobleman, named Godfrey, Lancaster, who was waiting his father's death to become Earl of Whitemanor, was introduced to the family. Godfrey's efforts, however, were in vain; Mary loved Fergus, and they were betrothed. A quarrel at length ensued, followed by a duel, in which Godfred was nearly slain; and Fergus, being caught and tried, was condemned to transportation.

During his voyage to Botany Bay he became acquainted with a Scotchman named Randal, who had been sentenced to fourteen years' transportation. With him he agreed to attempt an escape, which they at length accomplished, and turned pirates.

It is unnecessary to narrate the various extraordinary exploits they achieved, and the large sums of money they realized before they returned to Scotland. When they did return, however, it was to find Angus Macfarlane married, with two little girls, Clara and Annie; and Mary, the betrothed of Fergus, the neglected and despised Countess of Whitmanor. Her husband, being satisfied with her beauty, declared that the child to which she gave birth was the child of Fergus, and she fled away from him, bearing away with her her infant. From that time Angus Macfarlane and Fergus O'Brian commenced a conspiracy against the English government; and MacNab, who wrote to the Home Office for information upon their secret meetings, fell a victim to the revenge of the latter.

Shortly afterwards Fergus made a voyage to the Brazils, and on account of the great services which he rendered to Don Pedro, he was created a grandee of Portugal of the first class, Grand Cross of the Order of Christ, and *Marquis de Rio Santo in Parariba.* This, then, was the man who made so great a stir in the drawing-rooms of the nobility, and who by strange means was plotted against England.

Before resuming our narrative, we may say that about two years before, Mary herself returned to Scotland. Her daughter, she said, was dead; but she was not: though lost to her, she still lived in the prison of the beautiful Susannah, who was niece, therefore, to Brian Lancaster.

## CHAPTER XLVIX.

### SAVED.

At the end of the passage where Angel Bembo had passed his time watching Rio Santo and Angus Macfarlane, who was now in a raging delirium, was a low window which opened upon a court-yard surrounded by a wall; beyond the yard was a passage leading to Belgrave Lane.

One morning he was leaning out of his low window, when the sun in penetrating one of the rooms of Lord's Corner, exposed to his view a girl asleep in an arm-chair. She seemed suffering from painful visions, and ever and anon raised her small white hands in supplication. This was Anna Macfarlane, and it is scarcely necessary to state that she had been placed there by Bob Lantern, at the instigation of Paterson, for the purpose of delighting the Earl of Whitemore, to whom Lord's Corner belonged.

It may be imagined that the Italian after this kept a constant watch upon the proceedings of the inmates of Lord's Corner. Every day he saw her, nearly always asleep, and upon one occasion gazed upon by the Earl. One night, however, after he had crept down the passage, glanced through the key-hole, and seen Rio Santo sitting motionless by the bed-side of the sick man, he went to his post of observation. He was just in time. Anna was asleep in bed, and he saw the door of the room open and two men enter—Paterson and Lord Whitemanor. The former approached the bed, as if to carry away the slumbering girl, but with the wave of the hand the Earl dismissed him. Cold drops of sweat stood on Bembo's forehead. How could he prevent this misdeed? He had no need to fear, however. Before even gazing at the lovely creature who lay helpless before him,

the Earl caught sight of a paper on the floor, and picked it up. He started convulsively, re-read it, and then rushed from the room.

Ten minuter later Bembo saw him being carried out by his servants to his carriage, which had been waiting at the door.

Bembo's mind was made up; he armed himself, and after taking a last peep at the room where Rio Santo still sat by the bedside of Angus, he went out. He measured with eagar looks the distance which separated him from the window in which Anna's wax light was burning; and tried to throw up the balcony a silken ladder. He could not, however, succeed in making it hook on, but, fortunately, he was active and happy at expedients. His stiletto thrust in between two bricks served him as a stepping-stone, and by its aid, and that of some salient points, he at length succeeded in reaching the window. As he entered the room, Anna awoke with a start, and then rushing forward, threw herself into Bembo's arms.

"Stephen, oh! dear Stephen," she exclaimed, "For heaven has sent you to me."

A painful shudder ran through Bembo's nerves. He felt himself fainting upon hearing these words, which at a single blow destroyed his dearest hopes.

The candle throwing out a brighter light, Anna discovered her error. She withdrew herself from Bembo's arms, and in alarm ran to the other end of the room.

Bembo did not attempt to follow her. The more beautiful and innocent and charming she appeared, the more was his heart afflicted.

"Oh, heavens! how much I should have loved her!" he murmured. "Do not alarm yourself," he added aloud, raising her up from the corner in which she was crouching; "I come here to save you. I am sent by *him.*"

"By him?" cried Anna.

"Yes; by Stephen," he said, sadly.

"Oh! you have come from Mr. MacNab to pilot me away," cried Anna, joyfully. "Oh, blessings on you! I shall love you too."

"Come," he said, striving to disguise his cruel sorrow, "we must hasten."

He took the now unresisting girl in his arms, and began descending the silk ladder. When halfway down, they could hear a noise in one of the windows of Hibernia House.

"Oh! look—look!" cried Anna, in terror, "there is a phantom gliding among the trees!"

When they reached the ground, they heard the fall of some body on the pavement, and a half-naked man rising up.

"It is my father!" cried Anna, in terror, tearing herself from Bembo's arms, and rushing towards him.

"Leave me—leave me!" he cried, as Anna attempted to throw her arms round his neck; and then fled away, crying. "Both of them—both of them!"

He was out of sight in a moment; and Bembo, taking the half-fainting Anna in his arms, carried her away to the corner of the park, where he placed her in a coach.

From Hyde Park to Cornhill she did not utter a word, but more than once she sighed deeply. When they arrived at Mrs. MacNab's door, Bembo alighted and helped her out. She stepped resolutely on the pavement, but then stopped, as if undecided.

"Adieu! lady," said Bembo.

"Adieu!" murmured the girl.

Bembo thought he perceived, by the light of the gas lamps, that tears were standing in her eyes. She again hesitated a moment.

"Farewell—farewell!" she repeated; and knocking violently, entered the house without again turning.

She found herself, half an hour after Brian left her, alone in Dr. Moore's study, and still in a state of considerable alarm, when a slight moaning was heard beside her. She started up and listened attentively. The complainings became weaker, and then again were uttered more loudly. Taking a candle from the table, Susannah pushed opened the door and approached the bed where Clara was lying. Her gaze had scarcely fallen upon the features of the poor patient, when she was overcome with emotion. She recognized in her a young lady who had relieved her when she was dying of hunger in the street.

"Oh! is it, then, really you?" exclaimed she, as she bent over Clara, who regarded her joyfully.

Clara seemed astonished.

"You do not recollect me," said Susannah.

"Who are you, then, madam?" asked Clara.

"I am one whom once you relieved when dying of hunger in Cheapside."

"Hunger!" cried Clara; "alas! now I am dying of hunger!"

Susannah rushed out of the room, and returned instantly with the meal prepared for herself.

"Thanks—thanks!" cried Clara, as she eargely devoured; but, alas! when you are gone they will starve me again."

"Miserable wretches, to attack you, an angel of mercy and goodness! said Susannah; "but I will defend you. Let them come— I am as strong as a man."

At this moment some one stealthily entered the room.

It was Rowley.

"Tut! tut! tut!" he cried; what is this lady doing here? Why, you have been eating like an ogre. What do you think the doctor will say?"

He was prevented from approaching the girl, however, for Susannah stood between him and the bed, her eyes flashing, her bosom heaving with excitement.

He was counselling with himself what course to pursue, when the door opened, and Dr. Moore entered.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he said to Rowley,

"Sir Edmund passed through the secret door, and brought that lady with him," returned the assistant.

"This is no plea for her. Withdraw, and beg her to follow you."

"Sir," said Susannah, in a low but firm voice, "I shall not leave this room."

"Oh! do not abandon me," cried Clara, throwing her arms round her new friend.

The door was again opened. This time it was Tyrrel who entered; and just at the moment when Dr. Moore was rushing forward to seize Susannah, the robust arm of the blind man forcibly arrested him.

"What!" cried Dr. Moore, as he suggested to get free, "do you dare to offer me violence?—you!"

"It is my resolve that you must not kill that woman," said Tyrrell.

"Why?"

"Because she is my daughter."

Susannah trembled and turned pale. Moore fell back amazed.

"Ha! ha! Miss Susannah," continued Tyrrel, "do you not know me again?"

"I do remember you, sir," she replied; "yet—"

"'And yet' signifies nothing. You saw me hanged, did you not, in the days when I was Israels Spencer? Dr. Moore can tell you how he cut in the lower part of my throat an incision, which he supported by means of a quill. When the cord was drawn tight around my neck, I breathed below the rope through this incision. I am blind, when I like so to be," he added, giving to his eyes, which had been full of mysterious glee, their usually dead, glassy appearance; "but I saw what was going on here, and resolved to prevent it."

"Because she is your daughter?" asked Moore, contemptuously.

"Yes;—and, moreover, the Marquis de Rio Santo has commanded me to watch over her."

"Oh!" said the doctor, bowing his head.

"Yes;—I will see that she remains silent."

It was a few hours after this, when Israels-Spencer had departed with Dr. Moore, that Susannah once more made her way into the room, and locking the opposite door on the inside, made Clara dress herself in silence.

This done, they re-entered the study, Susannah carrying the almost dying girl in her arms. Once at the other end of the chamber, she placed her finger on a knob, which appeared to be intended to hold up the folds of a curtain, and pushed it with all her strength. A grating sound was heard beneath the drapery, and the secret door which communicated with the deserted house, flew away.

Half an hour after this, a hackney coach drew up, before Mrs. MacNab's door. Susannah alighted from it, and gazed at it with streaming eyes.

"Oh, how often have I searched for this house!" exclaimed she; "but now I shall never forget the way to it."

She knocked at the door. It was Anna who came to open it. The lovely girl threw her arms around Anna and kissed her.

"Your sister is in that coach, Anna," said Susannah.

"My sister!" cried Anna, rushing out of the house.

Susannah saw her bound into the coach, and clasp Clara in her arms. She remained observing the two delighted sisters for a few seconds, and with eyes full of joyful tears; and then she rapidly ran across the street, and got into a cab, in which she was driven will all speed to the house of the Countess of Lancewood.

Rio Santo had now made all his arrangements. Twenty years before, he had declared war against England in the name of his father, and of oppressed Ireland; and now he was about to strike a terrific blow at its most vital part—the Bank, into which his men had already made a subterranean passage, entered through an innocent shop.

"Gentlemen," said Rio Santo, when the assembly was complete, "I must inform you that, using the powers delegated to me, I have called out all the forces of the Family. I cannot now enter into a detailed account of all the different parts our men will play in London to-night; but I have consulted on that subject the most honourable members of the police, who form part of

this meeting. I may state, however, that in order to direct the attention of Government agents into another channel, a formidable insurrection will break out on a given signal. Ten thousand Irish are now in London, ready for action from Ireland, having harvested in the west and picked hops in Kent, and unsuspectedly tramped to town."

"But the twenty millions of the Reserve talk ?" said one.

"Hear, hear!" cried another.

"They shall be ours," returned Rio Santo, rising.

The Lords of the Night then separated, leaving only one with orders to open the gates on "Purgatory" at nightfall, so that the crowd enclosed within its walls might issue forth instead of revelling, and at the critical moment increase the general disorder.

Rio Santo got into his carriage, accompanied by Bembo and Randle Graham. In another carriage followed Falkstone and Sir Paul Waterfield, who arrived in Belgrave Square at the same time as the Marquis.

It was then four o'clock. The avenues of Hibernian House were perfectly clear. On entering his mansion, the Marquis found Angus Macfarlane, who greeted him nervously.

"My brother Angus!" said Rio Santo, offering him his hand. "I am happy to find you here. You would have been missed at a meeting at which all are assembled to whom I have confided my secret,—that secret which I entrusted to you long ago."

"It was fifteen years ago—one night—at the farm," said Angus, in a rambling voice, as he convulsively dressed the hand of the Marquis.

Randal Graham shook his head with an air of doubt and fear. Rio Santo proceeded:—

"To you, my friends, I have given the post of lieutenants in this revolt, which will decide the fate of my oppressed country in one blow. You already know your duty. At half-past eight you must depart to your several posts."

The time went by. The hour struck, and Randal Bembo, and Waterfield, after shaking hands with the Marquis, went out leaving him alone with Angus, who was still trembling with a feverish and unaccountable excitement. He was sobbing violently.

"What is the matter with you, Angus?" said the Marquis, smiling; "is your fever refurning?"

"My fever!" cried Angus, wildly. "Listen! Only a short time ago I was resolved to——but now——Oh, my brother, do not go; do not go, I entreat you."

"Fie, Mac.!" said Rio Santo. "These are womanish fears. If I die, you will not die with me."

He advanced towards the window, and wished to take the laird's hand. Angus, a prey of most overwhelming emotion, threw himself, weeping, into his arms.

The ground and the trees in Belgrave Square were covered with snow. Several dark forms were to be seen, sometimes remaining motionless, sometimes moving with exchanging places, like soldiers ranging in order of battle, ready for the word "Attention!"

Hardly had Angus touched Rio Santo, when he sprang violently away.

"Judas!—Judas!" he muttered; but though astonished by his actions, the Marquis heard not his words.

Rio Santo rang the bell.

"Get my tilbury ready," he said to the servant who appeared; "and harness my swiftest horse."

The servant went out; and a few moments later, the Marquis descended the steps round Hibernian House, absolutely dragging the laird after him. At the door stood a dogcart, with a beautiful mare.

"Jump up, Macfarlane," said Rio Santo.

Angus Macfarlane moved not.

All along the railing of the square a movement, so light as to be almost imperceptible, was made by the policemen in plain clothes, who had been waiting three hours. They glided along the railings, and stationed themselves opposite the portico of Hibernian House. Two of them cautiously approached the trap.

"Come, brother, come," Said Rio Santo, taking the laird's arm.

Angus started back. "No—no—no," he cried; "what matters the voice of dreams?"

"Well, come or stay," said the Marquis; "but decide quickly: our time is short."

Angus thought a moment.

"Well, I will go with you," he exclaimed. "Put your horse to a gallop,—a quick gallop.,'

"Rio Santo took the reins' and lifting his head to choose the way, perceived two or three men standing in tne middle of the road. A vague suspicion entered his mind. To the right and left he saw others, who appeared to be watching him.

"This is strange!" he muttered.

"Drive on!" Angus cried, fearfully, every limb trembling with paprehension.

The Marquis raised his eyes to the face of Angus, and saw that his agitated features betrayed the most acute anguish.

"My lord!—my lord!" cried a servant, rushing down at this moment from Hibernian House, "the men who are surrounding you lordship are armed. I am sure of it. I saw a pistol——

"Yes, yes!" cried Angus, "run over them!—your horse is good."

Rio Santo gently shook his reins.

"Clara," he said to the horse, softly, "my beautiful Clara!"

The noble animal impatiently pawed the earth.

"Clara!" exclaimed the Laird, placing his hand over his fainting heart.

Rio Santo loosened the reins, and added, in a half-whisper,—

"Hip, Clara! hip, my beauty!"

The animal bounced off, flying along the snow.

"Clara! Clara!" the Laird cried, rising up wildly. "Oh! I had forgotten them. What have yon done with her, Fergus O'Brian?"

## CHAPTER LI.

### THE CAPTURE.

ANGUS MACFARLANE had risen up, snatched the reins out of the hands of the Marquis, and pulled at them with such strength that he stopped the forward motion of the horse, and made it back with the dogcart across the foot pavement, close up to the steps of Hibernian House. The men, who had remained undecided up to this moment, now rushed forward at once, and in an instant the conveyance was completely surrounded.

"Brother Fergus!" cried Macfarlane, in a loud voice. "What have you done with Clara and with Anna?"

These furious cries were an enigma to Rio Santo. His first idea was, that he had been betrayed, so as to be surrounded by the police, and he remained sitting perfectly tranquil, while Macfarlane was gesticulating fiercely and foaming at the mouth beside him.

The Marquis de Rio Santo, on his part, made no visible effort to liberate himself. He looked with an air of surprise, but calmly, at the persons who surrounded him, and appeared to be waiting an explanation. But the features of the Marquis, which could so energetically express every feeling, could also, when occasion required, assume a direct mask. He remained apparently quiet and serene; but beneath this affected calmness, the result of desperate effort, there was concealed a dreadful agony. An hour later, all the united forces of the three kingdoms would have been insufficient to stay his fearful power; now, a few men could bar his progress.

"What is it you want?" cried the Marquis to two men who approached him, in one of whom he recognized Percival.

"I have come to ask you, my lord," replied Frank, for an ex-

planation of a cowardly and nameless crime. I am the brother of Harriet Percival, my lord."

"And the disappointed lover of Mary Trevor. I had not the honour of your sister's acquaintance."

He turned round, and saw MacNab standing beside him.

"I am the son of the MacNab," said the latter.

Rio Santo shuddered from head to foot.

"MacNab—my blood-brother MacNab," gloomily murmured the Laird. "Blood for blood!" and he suddenly caught the Marquis by the throat. For a few seconds a confused struggle took place in the tilbury, and then Angus was flung violently out.

An imperious voice then exclaimed,—

"As you value your lives, let go the bridle."

The two men who were holding the horse did not obey the order. Two shots were heard, and the noble animal bounded forward—for the men who held her had fallen lifeless on the snow. The tilbury glided off with the rapidity of lightning. A man, however sprang forward and clung to the shafts. In a few moments the horse fell, and the Marquis of Rio de Santo was thrown heavily to the ground. He remained for some time stunned by the shock; but had, however, regained his feet before the greater number of his adversaries had advanced to seize him. He was standing in the road, holding his dagger in his hand. MacNab and Percival were the first to rush on him.

"What! two to one?" he cried.

"Surrender!" cried the Scot.

At this moment a distant murmur was heard.

"I surrender to the Honourable Frank Percival," said Rio Santo.

While speaking, he lent an attentive ear to the distant noise, which kept increasing. It was like an immense shouting, louder at intervals and then subsiding, to become louder still.

The party moved forward towards Chapel Street, the Marquis preserving an aspect of cold indifference. It was quite certain that the shouts from Grosvenor Place, reached his ear, the involuntarily quickened his pace, as if to outstrip his guards. They had reached the corner of Belgrave Square, when Angus Macfarlane, who was doomed to be the destruction of Rio Santo, whispered something in MacNab's ear, and the direction of their march was changed. In Belgrave Square they met with some policemen, who had made their appearance on being informed that two gentlemen had been shot. Rio Santo was delivered

over to their charge, and was escorted to the nearest police station.

Whilst the invading forces struggled as far as Farringdon Street and road, hesitating to proceed westerly by Holborn, or still narrower Fleet Street, a battalion of Guards marched out of the Bank and quietly stationed themselves in front of the soda-water shop.

The members of the Family stared at them. Paddy O'Chrane uttered some of his best-selected oaths, and Snail mewed unmercifully.

At midnight, all were still sleeping quietly within the City, except a dozen masons, employed by torch-light, in bricking up the door and windows of the soda-water shop.

Happily—and Mr. Smith thanked Heaven for the same—not a soul remained in the subterraneous passage, absolutely no one, excepting Saunders, the human Jumbo, who was thus walled up with the remains of his last night's supper, and his crock of liquor, to puzzle the Newzealand archœologist, who may unearth him in the twentieth century.

Without leaders, arms and money, in particular, the headless hydra melted away.

## CHAPTER LII.

### DEVOTION.

We must pass over six weeks. The Middlesex Assizes have been held, and Fergus O'Brian, a British subject, but calling himself Don Jose Maria Telles d' Alarçon, Marquis de Rio Santo, a grandee of Portugal, has been declared guilty of the murder of MacNab,, of belonging to an illegal association, and of an attempt to pillage the Bank of England; and condemned to be hung within Newgate three days from the date of his sentence.

About ten at night, two days after this, Clara and Anna were in bed, the former watching her sister with eagerness. When she was convinced that Anna was asleep, she raised the bed-clothes with a noiseless motion, and glided to the ground. She was fully dressed. Taking her shoes in her hand, she crept down stairs, procured the street door key, and went out into the street.

"I know where Newgate is," murmured Clara to herself' "I have often passed by there."

At this time the honest and incorruptible turnkey was visiting the condemned cell. In that cell, to prevent all chance of escape, was placed a powerful fellow, no other than our Scottish friend, Randal Graham, in brief, emissary of the League.

The turnkey's visit over, Randal rose, saying—

"Are you ready, my lord ? "

"I am," cried Rio Santo, rising from his straw bed.

Randle approached the grated window, which looked out upon a court running then in from Newgate Market, and threw from between the massive bars of iron a half-crown piece, which rang on the pavement a sharp sound.

Scarcely an instant had clasped, when from below, was heard a loud mew.

"There is Snail," cried Graham, "they are ready. Come, O'Brian, we have to part now. Listen to me for one moment. For my own father I should have refused to do what I am about to do for you. If we never meet again, think of poor Randal Graham."

The Marquis was much moved.

"I shall always think of you as a dear and devoted friend," said he; "but why talk thus? We shall surely meet once more."

Randal shook his head.

"I know the Break-neck well," he replied; "a man might just as well throw himself from St. Dunstan's tower on to the pavement. But, nevertheless, we both of us know that somebody has escaped, for Jack Sheppard did."

"I have never seen this place you call the Break-neck, Randal," said Rio Santo.

"Well, well," said Graham, "mind, I tell you beforehand, I don't care one jot for your Irish Paddies; and if I give my blood for any one, it is for you personally, and you alone, O'Brian."

He hurriedly unbuttoned his coat, and unwound a silken rope which he had concealed under it.

When this silken rope was solidly attached, Randal squeezed the Marquis's hand with emotion, stepped lightly out, and began his perilous descent.

The Marquis listened eagerly. It was a moment of intense anxiety. Presently, however, a shake all along the rope silently announced that he had reached the ground in safety.

"Thank Heaven," murmured the Marquis, "he is safe."

A watchman cried,—"Who goes there?"

"Quick!" rose a general cry, "A prisoner is escaping!"

The effect of this was magical.

The chimneys of the neighbouring houses appeared to have been transformed into policemen. Randal turned towards the prisoner again, taking care not to urge his horse faster than was necessary to prevent his pursuers catching him.

In the meantime Newgate Street was completely deserted by all.

When we say deserted, we mean of course by police, for there was still a large concourse of persons there upon whom the flight of Randal seemed to produce no effect. These were men belonging to the Lords of the Night, in the centre of whom Angelo Bembo stood, holding the bridle of a tall and powerful horse.

Near them stood a young woman dressed in black.

When Randal Graham dashed by, this young woman had just reached the spot, having entered the Old Bailey from Ludgate Hill. She examined the face of the fugitive eagerly.

"Alas!" she murmured, "it is not Edward."

Then she gazed up at the gloomy walls of the prison, where he whom she knew as Edward was waiting impatiently the signal to escape.

"I knew I could find my way hither," she cried; "but how can I reach him?—how can I penetrate those black and threatening walls?"

Clara—for it was she—drew around her the shawl she had thrown upon her shoulders, and pulled her veil over her face.

At this moment the Marquis de Rio Santo heard the signal, and, letting himself down by the silken rope, reached the ground in safety. He then stole quietly along towards the Market and made a detour.

"Here we are, my lord," cried a voice from a doorway. Bembo immediately threw the rein over the horse's neck, and placed one end of it in the hand of the Marquis.

"Who goes there?" cried the police, issuing from the debtors' door.

"Mount quickly, my Lord!" cried Bembo.

Rio Santo opened his arms widely, and the young Italian threw himself into them, overcome by his feelings.

"Who goes there?" repeated the guard.

Rio Santo bounded into the saddle, and then slowly turned round the corner. He bent forward, recognized Clara, placed his arm around her waist, raised her before him, and then, just as the new comer was crying, "Stop that horseman!" struck his spurs into his steed, which, doubly burdened though it was, bounded off with the swiftness of an arrow.

They soon reached King's Cross. They alighted at the station and abandoned the horse.

Rio Santo was going to St. Mary of Crewe, where Waterfield, Smith, Folkstone, and Bembo were to join him with Randal, if he were still free.

In spite of the tender interest which he felt for Clara Macfarlane, and although still unconquered and unsuccessful, he was combining new projects, and was recommencing, in his own mind, the war he had so long declared against England.

They arrived on the borders of Scotland. There the relays, which had been ordered by the Family, ceased. The Marquis conceived it better to leave his carriage, and having procured a

horse, Clara rode behind him on a pillion. She had felt as if a new flood of life were coursing throught her veins; but, by degrees, a reaction took place, and her delicate limbs sunk under the oppressive change.

Rio Santo suddenly perceived that the arm which had been placed around his waist was slackening its hold. He turned round, and saw Clara as pale as a marble statue, and her eyes closed.

The had not more than half a mile to reach Crewe Castle. Nevertheless, the Marquis spread his cloak upon the grass, and having taken off his saddle, made a pillar of it for Clara's head; having first taken the precaution to withdraw his pistols from their holsters, which he threw down upon the turf.

"She is not there to-day," she said, with joyful anxiety. "Tell me, Edward, she is not come, is she?"

Rio Santo saw at once than the poor girl was labouring under some strange delusion; he could not comprehend of whom she was speaking.

"We are alone," replied he, "and close to your father's house, Clara."

"My father!" exclaimed Clara. "Oh yes, yes, Edward! the farm is just on the other side of the hill. Oh, how happy we shall be there!"

She paused abruptly, but immediately added,—

"That is, if my sister does not intervene, as she did the other time."

A flash of ungovernable fury darted from her eyes. She suddenly threw herself back upon the ground, and her hand, by chance, fell upon the cold barrel of one of the pistols. Her action was rapid as thought. An explosion broke the silence of that sequestered spot. Rio Santo fell to the ground—the ball from the pistol had struck him in the breast. The poor insensate Clara fled, shrieking with terror.

Rio Santo had fallen upon his back, his eyes heavenward. He felt that he was mortally stricken, and a vanquished man. The only man he had ever loved had betrayed him, and the only woman he would have respected was the instrument of his death. Was it not a severe penalty for his punishment to glow not upon his faults, but from a good deed?

Night thickened over the corpse, which could not be distinguished from the thick grass in which it was embedded. But when the moon, peering above the adjacent tree tops, once more rendered the scene visible, a female form was kneeling by the body. It was that of Mary Macfarlane, Countess of Whitmanor,

who recognized in the dead one Fergus, her first and only beloved.

Mary stooped over him, and left on his icy forehead a chaste, sisterly kiss. Surrounded by such nocturnal splendours, hailed by the fervent prayer of one so tenderly beloved, no deathbed scene could have been more tranquilly beautiful.

Let us now pass in review the long defile of characters figuring in our story.

Prince Dimitri Tolster was recalled to Russia, but travelling with that tardiness peculiar to Russians summoned homeward, he tarried at Geneva. A mountain-lake trout disagreed with him,—though others said that it was served with a pepper sauce *à la Nihiliste*,—and he died on the frontier in the railway station.

The Viscount de Lantues-Luces married a bluestocking, and the press are now disputing whether he or his wife wrote all of "The Serious Revelations of an Anglo-French Fashionable," agitating the two capitals.

Marlett avoided the rope by a flight to the United States, where he was injudiciously, or, mayhap, interestedly advised to stand up against the Champion Slogger, who "slogged" him, whatever that process implies, so unmercifully that he died in hospital. By a singular chance, as if in retaliation for his having maintained the traditions of the fine art of Busking, he died actually from a bandage to hold his broken jaw in place of slipping over his nose and mouth and stopping his breath. Snail, partially rebuked by Loo's demise, because the clerk of an Old Bailey touting solicitor. Rowley is toiling in the fortifications of Gibraltar. Dr. Moore died from a lancet wound after a vivi-section experiment, in order to find out the remedy for the gout, which crippled Tyrrel, the Dark Man, and, flying to his head, made him sightless in reality. The Duchess de Gevres, *alias* the Contessa Cantacuzini, was last seen trying on a Salvation Army bonnet, and may be essaying a new mode of life. O'Chrane became landlord by wedlock of the "Crown Arms," but a little row between him and Paterson led to the police investigating their antecedents, and they failed to appear on their cross-summonses, and frequent the race-courses, without sleeping more than three days in any town, in a kind of fantastic, No Man's Land.

Bod Lantern and Temperance finished their existences is St. Luke's, both insane victims—the one of intemperance, the other of money-lust.

The Countess of Lancewood is one of the permanent English colony on the Riviera, where Miss Trevor concluded a long convalescence ere becoming Mrs. Percival, and then Lady Kirk by the decease of her husband's brother.

Poor Clara was less fortunate. She and Anna, with the MacNabs, retired to Crewe Castle, their inheritance by the suicide of Angus in the Serpentine after his denunciation of his brother. Clara finally recovered her reason after this shock, but her husband, Stephen, could never dispel all ner melancholy.

Their calm life was one where resignation took the place of happiness, in the circle consisting of the Countess of Whitemanor, Susannah, the Laird's daughter, MacNab and his daughters.

Anna alone, once gayest of the gay, passed many an hour in painful brooding, concealed from the rest.

But one day, a young foreigner of noble means, arrived at the castle, for whom revived Anna's sweetest smiles. This was Angelo Bembo, who had obtained British recognition of his land-claims at Malta, and who came to request her hand. His proposal being joyfully received, the marriage ceremony took place a fortnight after his arrival.

Susannah had not seen Mr. Lancaster but once since their fatal separation in Wimpole Street, and this was immediately after the decease of the Earl of Whitemanor, taking place at his country seat. The new peer came to inform her of the death of her father, also. Their relationship forbade their union, so that he did not even spend the night under the same roof. But his passion was not to be extinguished by absence, it was the love of a youth in the breast of a man in his prime, and not to be shaken off by any agitation. He remained eccentric and more so than ever. Susannah caught her trout line in that of a strange Southron in one of the burns, and their marriage ensued. Lancaster heard of how happy she was as the Countess of Ledbury, but still he would not follow the example. When people saw him, a peer of wealth, who ought to have been gladsome, always moping or fantastic, they looked at him askant as the Florentines at Dante after his return from the Inferno, and whispered to one another.

"See what comes from too deep an investigation of the London of Mysteries."

THE END.

Sterling, November 1890.

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